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JOAN OF GARIOCH



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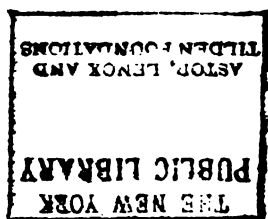
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TORONTO





“ ‘PRINCESS LIEVEN IS MY SISTER,’ SAID HE.”

JOAN OF GARIOCH

BY

ALBERT KINROSS

AUTHOR OF "DAVENANT," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN M. BURKE

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JOAN OF GARIOCH

JOAN OF GARIOCH

CHAPTER I

HERE one remembers things; but there — they happened. The uneventful days go from me here, one like another. I rise, I eat my breakfast, I look at the paper for an hour, and then a walk. Sometimes I follow the river and go to Windsor; sometimes I cross at the ferry and go to Cookham through Maidenhead and Cookham Dene. Luncheon is at one, tea at five, dinner at eight. At eleven I am in bed. A few hours every day are spent at my writing-table. From it I can look up and see the river flowing gently towards Windsor; a thin row of poplars lines the farther bank; on Sundays fishermen come and fish all day from the towpath, catching very little. Usually I smoke a pipe when I sit up here, lighting it and relighting it, looking out across the river, writing the odds and ends that serve me for companionship, or dreaming over her portrait. You have never seen her portrait. No one ever will. It is a miniature, perhaps three inches high, perhaps less. It is not so broad; and the frame is a smooth band of silver, quite plain. There is a dent in the left-hand corner of this frame. That is where Arbusoff's bullet was turned aside; for the silver is curved and polished and rather heavy. Sometimes I think: "What if he had hit the glass and touched *her*?"

My God, I would have killed Arbusoff, not with weapons, but with my live hands!

The first dinner gong has just struck. It is half-past seven. Each day at this hour Owens has laid out my evening clothes, put a can of hot water in my dressing room, and there are fires in all the empty rooms downstairs: in the large dining room where I eat alone, in the large drawing-room where I sit alone, and in the square hall where no one ever comes to ask for me. No wonder that I am mostly up here, where I can take her portrait from its case, and place it on my writing-table; where the past confronts me; and where I have such company as few men of my day have known and loved, aye, fought with and overcome. Here in this room, where I let no one disturb me, there are, indeed, splendid and puissant ghosts. Below, where I eat, or sit for an hour after eating, there is nothing. My servants are there, an old dog, and furniture that I took with the house. When I go to London, this room, they tell me, is cleaned and put in order. They can do as they please about that; for when I walk, or when I go from here, her portrait is always with me, in its separate pocket, next my heart. It sounds foolish, perhaps; but can I help it, knowing what I have known, waiting as I am waiting? I have nothing else; only the sealed envelope in which it came to me, written in whose hand? Not hers. Now I must change my clothes and prepare for dinner. It is a solitary, silent meal. . . .

I have dined; I have smoked my usual Henry Clay; the old dog has kept me company, and I have played to him a little — a movement from Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony," the prayer from Statkovsky's "Maria." He snored gently, or romanced in his dreams, at ease on

the hearth-rug, his old face between two ancient paws. Why he belongs to me, I hardly know; but I suppose I must have paid for him, just as I have paid for this house, and its furniture, and the servants, and the pony and cart that take me to and from the station. He is a good old dog, and often I am glad to have him by me. He has never been up here.

The house is deathly quiet. The fire burns noiselessly between the two large bookcases, the blinds are drawn, there is no sound but the everlasting downpour of the weir. Sometimes, in this hour and place, I hear a cry of pain, or the noise of some tragic scuffle among the reeds. But, mostly, it is deathly still, with only the steady downpour from the weir to remind me that this is the world where many things have happened, are happening, and will happen again.

Her portrait, as you might think, is not a miniature in colour, but one, executed simply, in black and white. The artist who drew her was worthy of his hire. Instead of unavailing browns and pinks and reds, he has relied solely on exquisite light and shadow. She is wearing a plain cloth gown, without an ornament; so that nothing distracts from the perfect rendering of her face and the one dear hand on which her chin is resting. It is a half-length, little more than a head and shoulders, drawn with a tenderness, a rare devotion, a fine purity, which prove that this unknown painter had approached her reverently, careless of the fashion of the moment, and seeking only for the radiance and olive dusk of her soft face. Beauty, fire, humility, all are present in that little frame; pride, steadfastness, candour; and preëminent, secure, the calm of that breeding which made her accept the last sacrifice

in obedience to the claims and prestige of an ancient name. Hidden away under the silver, and very small, is an inscription in her handwriting: "J. S." Her Christian name is Joan, my surname you know. . . .

It is morning, and I am here again, looking out over the hazy landscape and the river which flows past my door. I have read my paper, and even written a letter to its editor. A Russian correspondent said that Baron Raden tortured people; I said that Baron Raden tortured no one but himself. I signed my letter "Verax," which, I believe, means "the truth-speaker," or something very similar. . . .

I have taken a walk, only as far as Maidenhead to-day, for, on the road, an idea grew in me, bidding me return. I am resolved to write down the events of the last few years, just as they happened, omitting nothing, exaggerating nothing, and honestly; so that if ever a day come when she and I may belong to one another, she will see that I have been loyal, and that never for one moment has the thought of her left me, or any other passion come between the memory and the dream that I possess of her.

You may think it foolish that, in this age, I should dwell so mightily upon the past, letting a bygone love usurp the place of a religion and the teachings of the Church. But, as I believe in God, so I believe in her; and as I believe in God's mercy, so I believe that in the fulness of time my prayers will be answered and meet with their reward. The portrait she sent me is before me as I make this full confession. The packet was addressed in a strange hand and sealed with a strange seal; but, hidden away under the silver and very small, I can read the message



"THE PORTRAIT SHE SENT ME IS BEFORE ME AS I MAKE THIS
FULL CONFESSION."

that she wrote: "J. S." The first letter of her name, and the first letter of mine. . . .

It is afternoon, a January day, with blue skies, and the sun warm on one's face and hands. The river is more beautiful than I have words; all the trees are tipped with buds; all the thrushes are full of music. As I walked to-day, my thoughts were turned outwards, the first time these many weeks. For a long ecstatic hour, I forgot my pain and the buffets of this tragic world. Returning here, I found a parcel from a photographer in town. A week or two ago I went into his shop. "I will have a picture made for her," I had often said; and that day I kept my promise. "No proofs and no retouching," I said to the man; "I want my face, just as it is, without flattery and without omissions." He understood, and at once told me the story of a bishop who had come there not so very long ago and had made the same stipulations that I had just made. Several times since then I have caught myself wondering what thoughts and what emotions had lined *his* face. Now the pictures are here, and I know which one of them is for her.

I have an old photograph by me, one I had taken in '99, before going out to South Africa. I am in uniform, with my Indian medal, and look exactly like any other of those young fellows one used to see by the dozen in the illustrated papers. Nothing in the face but youth, and discipline, and Clery's "Tactics." A clean, honest, thoughtful kid is he of '99. I remember how I used to read Moltke and Wilkinson, and Henley for verse. I put Moltke above Napoleon, and, if I could have had a wish, it would have been to see these two at it, with an army of 250,000 men apiece. That was '99. To-day I am just

as tough, the same chest and shoulders, the same carriage; but the eye and the jaw are changed, are both grown dangerous; and the nostrils seem a-quiver with a passionate self-control. I always had a healthy colour, and that hasn't changed; the short mustache bristles military fashion, just as in '99; the close black hair is iron-gray, in this new picture. . . . I look him of 1907 over critically, and he looks back, unflinching, stoical, with the least glimmer of a secret pain behind his eyes; and the nostrils really seem to tremble under a supreme self-mastery. Looking more closely into his face, I see, above all, a passion that is bound, that is imprisoned, but unbroken. Though chained, it is defiant; though mastered, it is proud; though beaten, it is patient; and though denied, it witnesses. . . . Such is he whom the photographer has sent to me in 1907. More than a man, I have before me an embodied will — a will to suffer, a will to endure, a will to live. For her sake, I add thereto. Without her, I know that the eyes would lose their purpose, the rigid jaw relax, the firm mouth slacken. And the nostrils — all their quivering would be over.

I put that face away — till she claim it. Now, as I think of it, he of 1907 reminds me of a horse scarred in battle, but ready to take the field again — ready always. The same curve of the nostril, the same strange light behind the eye, the same impassioned patience and restraint.

CHAPTER II

I **MUST** go back to my home-coming, and the house in Portland Place. Her parents lived there, and her three brothers. The Gariochs had a big place in the country, but this is where they stayed in town.

Her father, Sir Alison, had sent for me; not that I required much asking. The day I landed, or, rather, the first morning, his man was round at my hotel. Naturally it was the Langham, so as to be close. I remember the peculiar relish of sleeping in a comfortable bed, of having a modernly appointed room at my disposal, and servants ready to take my smallest orders. I remember the bath I had in the morning, the barber who shaved me, and the breakfast I ate in the large dining room with its outlook over Nash's church. It was two years since I had tasted luxury; two years since I had known the security of peace; two years since I had put aside my uniforms and revelled in clean linen and civilian dress. The War, South Africa, Boer, and Thomas Atkins lay somewhere in the clouds as I opened my eyes that first morning and nestled in a snug brass bedstead. What dreams I dreamt; what soft, romantic dreams! While I was eating breakfast, the man came with Sir Alison's message. "We expect you at noon to-day," he wrote; and that was all.

A couple of hours to kill. I was punctual, on the stroke. Davis, the old butler, opened the door to me. There

seemed a silent sympathy in his modest greeting. "Glad to see you safe, Master James," he said; "many's the time we've looked for your name in the papers, and, when we found it — well, it seemed a long time to wait, Master James."

I don't know that I paid much attention to Davis's welcome. I heard him, and I recall his very words; for at such an hour the mind is as wax, and has a place for all the music in the world; but I was listening for another voice; for the rustle of her skirt, for the patter of her little feet as she descended. Ah, how many thousand times my heart had risen at this! My eyes were on the great staircase down which she must come. "You're quite well, Davis?" I said; and he, "Lord bless you, Master James, I'm always well; and I haven't been to no South Africa fighting they Boers; now, have I?"

I laughed at him.

We had reached the doorway of Sir Alison's library, a large and sober room, with little furniture but books and a big table.

Davis announced me.

Sir Alison was waiting there, and with him were Roy and Noll and Fergus, her brothers, handsome fellows, big fellows, like Sir Alison himself. Noll had been wounded, and was newly home; Fergus was at Oxford; and Roy had raised yeomanry, and taken his chance with these. There had been four of them, dear to me since boyhood; Darcy had died out there, and they wore black for him. I looked round the well-known room — last time I stood there, Sir Alison had given her to me. We were five men in it, and no one else.

"You can go, Davis," said Sir Alison — he had taken

my hand without a word; "and remember, we are not to be disturbed, on no account to be disturbed."

"If her ladyship —" Davis ventured.

"Lady Garioch will not send for me," said Sir Alison; and Davis backed out, slowly, sorrowfully, as I recall him now. He had delayed the blow by a moment, and that was the best he could do for me, bless his soft heart.

Sir Alison looked many years older than when I had last seen him. He was still erect; but he carried himself with an effort, and was more white than gray. The boys were very quiet, true Gariochs, every one of them, dark, almost swarthy. Their mother was one part Italian, and descended from the princely house of Staffa; but the Gariochs have always been black and noble and proudly Catholic, though never a priest dare enter their houses, save at a christening, a wedding, or a funeral. They say that the Cardinal had killed his man in a duel, and then offered the Pope as many converts as his opponent had shed drops of blood. He had been a missionary in China, so much was certain.

I had shaken them all by the hand, and Heaven knows what we said to one another. Nothing of any moment; the air was too tense for that.

Sir Alison bade me be seated, and I obeyed.

"Here is the telegram you sent from Southampton," he began; "I opened it. Here are your last seven letters." These were unopened.

I waited for him to continue.

"They are addressed to Miss Garioch," he pursued; "there is no Miss Garioch; Joan is now Comtesse de Jarnac and married."

"These belong to you, Jim," he said, placing the en-

velopes before me. "I had no right to take your hand just now; I ask your pardon."

And still I waited.

We could hear the clock tick on the mantel board, and the cheerful blaze of the fire below it; we could hear the sound of wheels in the neighbouring streets; we could hear the silence.

Sir Alison continued.

"I have no excuse," he said. "I pledged the honour of our name; not mine alone, but ours, my boys' name, hers, my wife's; a name that was given to me in trust, that will be handed on, that belongs to none of us and to all of us. I pledged the name of Garioch, and she redeemed it."

Again I waited.

"I have sold her — for three hundred thousand pounds," said Sir Alison. "I have broken my word with you, and I have kept it with them."

I was in the dark. Roy knew it, and Noll knew it, and Fergus knew it.

Roy interrupted us.

"The guv'nor means this," he said; "he was a director of the British and American Corporation. It cracked up last year; and our name was in it. He has paid up every penny on every share he held, and let the public down easy. The thing's in liquidation now, and the guv'nor's the biggest shareholder. He'll see nothing back, except our name."

"And Joan?" I asked.

"To obtain this money, we had to sell her;" Roy's face was granite; "the guv'nor has told you for how much. This house and Garioch are only ours for life; they are

mortgaged all they will stand; we're letting and clearing out. The gov'nor believed in Nathan Aldis, the promoter; he had a good deal of money lying idle. He lost that, and half a million more. Took a header to save the Corporation, and was too late. Aldis committed suicide after his trial — you've seen that in the papers; and then our noble brother-in-law came along and made a bid for Joan. She and the gov'nor had to choose between the two evils. Joan is a Garioch. Now you understand."

"Perfectly," said I; and then, facing them, "There were you three and myself."

"In South Africa," said Roy.

"South Africa is in the same world as London."

"Three hundred thousand," said Roy.

"Couldn't we promote companies, if necessary, and swindle?"

"No," said Roy, "we couldn't."

His even voice calmed me.

"I understand," I said, "your Count —"

"De Jarnac," said Roy.

"De Jarnac," I repeated, "turned up at the critical moment and made his offer?"

"He had proposed to her before," said Sir Alison, "and as a gentleman."

"So he retired, to come on again — not as a gentleman?"

"He made his offer, and Joan and I accepted it."

"You explained me away?"

"Joan explained you — as was honourable," said Sir Alison.

"And Monsieur de Jarnac?"

"Accepted the position."

"You had no hesitations?"

"Many, till we read in the newspapers one day that you were 'missing.'"

"And that decided you?"

"I put our honour in Joan's hands, and left the decision with her. She was free."

I looked up at his poor white head and shrunken face. He had thought me dead or dying out there. Heaven knows what he had thought and hoped and suffered!

"By Gad, she was right, sir!" said I.

"You are honest with us, Jim?"

"I have said that Joan was right, sir."

"And I," said Sir Alison, "I offered you an insult on the very threshold of this room!"

"You gave me your hand," I said, "and Roy and Noll and Fergus did the same."

"You forgive us?"

"There is nothing to forgive, sir."

"And Joan?"

"There is nothing to forgive Joan, sir. With De Jarnac it is different."

"We took his money."

"I have taken nothing;" and with that I asked for news of Lady Garioch, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER III

WITH De Jarnac, it was indeed different. I had taken nothing from him, and from me he had taken everything.

Before leaving the house in Portland Place, I was given the last letter from her that I have opened. Sir Alison handed it to me after I had seen Lady Garioch. There were no tears shed during that interview. In the mother's face I saw the daughter's. The resemblance had never seemed to me as absolutely striking until to-day; but, perhaps, when the heart is drowning, it clutches at straws.

Joan's face, clouded by time and experience, I saw in the dimmed vision of it before which I bowed. The same honesty, the same candour, were in the voice that uttered my name; the same resolute eyes and mouth, that would know love but never sink with it. Such women make men, never unmake them. They meet you as an equal, and with a queenly something that commands acceptance. There is a dash of the man in these proud spirits, just as in your hero there is some touch of woman. It means that he had a mother; it means that she had a father.

Lady Garioch accepted my homage and asked after my news. To what had transpired in the library downstairs she made no reference; the Garioch women left such business to their men. She made me relate some detail of the campaign, and my own share in it.

I told her of the night attack at Maatjesdorp and its repulse, of the butt-end blow that had laid me out,

of my unconsciousness, and the broken head I had nursed during the weeks in which I was a prisoner.

"That's what they meant by calling you 'missing'?" she said. It was her one reference to the matter that most possessed us.

"You stayed when your men ran?" she asked.

"It was a new draft — they sent us kids or gutter-scrapings; my best chaps had been shot a year before," I tried to explain.

"You stayed," she said, and nodded her approval.

She made me tell her of my escape, and the three weeks' ride which brought me back to cognisance again.

"We heard you had returned," she said, and in her face, so like my own dear Joan's, I could read the still, deep thoughts that she repressed.

"And now," she ended, "you will rejoin your regiment, a full captain?"

"I have three months' leave."

"Your parents are at Lympne?"

"I go down to-morrow."

"Go and see them," she said; "there is very little for you to do in town."

I promised.

She gave me her hand. That was just like Joan's, exquisitely preserved, young as youth, not large, not small, but capable; the hand of charity and deeds.

I put it to my lips — we were still old-fashioned in that house; and then Sir Alison came in with Joan's last letter.

I declined the invitation that they gave for lunch; nor did they press it. The three of us knew that we were better alone.

Roy met me in the hall, and Noll and Fergus.

"Dine with me to-night; the club, at eight," I said.

They agreed.

We parted like conspirators. Davis affected not to see us. In my cab I read Joan's letter.

"Father will explain everything," she wrote; "I had no other choice. In this world none; in the next — what does my Jim say? I shall never forget you; that is impossible; and if, in God's mercy, I am ever released, you shall know of it, and I will wait until you come to claim me. My heart is broken, Jim; but that is little. God grant I have not broken yours, the truest He has ever quickened. For my sake save it from this wreck; for my sake live on, and let your spirit rise and lift you above this awful moment. You must have wondered why no letters came from me; you did not doubt me, that I know. This thing is now explained. You will judge me as I would judge you — humbly. All my girlish pride is broken, Jim; but I have shed no tears. To weep would be death, for I could weep my life away to-night, and that would not save us in our trouble. I ask for no promises. I only say that till the end and beyond it the heart I gave to you is yours. Nothing can change that. My lips have never touched any but yours; they never shall. Whatever happens, do not let me fade. Do as you like, Jim; it will be best and right. I have no claim on anything; but you were all the world to me, and I have forgotten nothing. You remember the woods beyond Compton, the walk we took to Windermere that first July, our happiness in the Bois and at Meudon when father and mother and I were doing Paris? We had been different before then; you were so much older than I; you seemed a thousand years old when you used to come and stay

with us from school. You remember our good-by at Waterloo, you with your men? How calm we were; and how you said, 'Go home, Joan,' before the train was really off. I knew why you sent me away, and father and mother. Mother knew too. We went to the play that evening to try and laugh, and mother came into my room when we were home again and sat with me. It was late at night, and we sat there and talked of you. She loosened my gown and took the pins out of my hair, just as though I had been a child again, and when she kissed me, I shut my eyes and tried to make-believe her kisses were yours. Jim, I am crying at last, and I dare not cry. God keep you and God guard you for that far-off day. Do not forget me; do as you think right; if I could give you happiness as well as tears, I would die twice instead of dying once."

"Always and forever, Joan," she signed the page that I had turned.

There had been no need for her to write. I would have believed in her and stood my ground through an eternity, knowing that loyal heart and its pure radiance. That she had been given to another was of small account in my regard for her. I recognised the reasons, and they were final, worthy of her and of her name. My claim, my darkened, absolute claim, strong though it was, must rank as dust, before the sacrifice to which she was condemned. In this life, perhaps, she could never belong to me. In the next, no eloquent company promoter, no Nathan Aldis, gulling her father and, perhaps, himself, no unwritten law such as that which must divide us here, could come between us. When I reached the next, was of small moment to me as I drove south that April day. The sooner the better, it seemed to me. Death would have



"WE SAT THERE AND TALKED OF YOU."

been a boon that hour, a pastime making straight for her. For she had promised that she would come to me on that far shore, where nothing could divide us. It seemed a rendezvous, a place of meeting, and glad would I have been to wait there first.

As I write, I have unfolded that last letter and held it to the light again. Not that my memory requires a jogging, not that there is a word of it which would escape, but here, in my solitude, as in the crowded places of the past, I love sometimes to look upon her hand again and see with my own eyes the tenderness and faith that she could fuse in everything she touched. Speech in her mouth became alive; words on her pen became a voice. A heart beat through them; they had power, they had passion, they had love. And she was artless, for all her high divinity. What she spoke was herself, what she wrote down was herself; and to-day I can hear her, see her, as on any of those other days when she was mine and treading the same paths.

I have folded her letter and put it in its place again. It is a raw January morning; the wind cuts shrewdly along the river, and drives the water wrinkled downstream. The sky is dull and overcast, the willows shiver, the tall poplars give way, and yet the robins in the laurel bushes are chirping. The luncheon bell has gone, and it is one o'clock.

I look through these pages again; the day is nearly over. Tears stand in my eyes, as once they stood in hers, brave soul that trusted me and in my manhood. I have never reproached her, and I thank God for that. To

been in the family for centuries — he rather boasted of it. House in Paris too — near the Parc Monceau.”

“Is he young?”

“About thirty — tall, expansive, and not bad looking — the usual kind of foreigner, only more so.”

“Where did he meet Joan?”

“At Pisa.”

“Why Pisa?”

“The winter before the smash — the gov’nor, mother, and Joan were in Italy — you’ve heard of it. De Jarnac was with a party, including young Croisnel — you remember Croisnel, he used to be attached to the Embassy at Albert Gate?”

I remembered Croisnel.

Roy continued: —

“De Jarnac seems to have taken to Joan from the first. It was, at any rate, made clear to him that she was engaged and that her *fiancé* was absent in South Africa. He’s a cool hand — laughed it off — expressed his sympathy, his astonishment — perhaps, after all, she might be persuaded to change her mind. Joan, I think, must have been more amused than angry with him. He was at Florence when they were there, at Rome, at Perugia, even at Orvieto; he asked permission to call on them in London. Then he met Nathan Aldis and got to Garioch. We three were away at the time, and Fergus was up at Oxford.”

“You might have kicked him out?” I put in here.

“None of us were there except the gov’nor, mother, and Joan, and that poor idiot Aldis — people called him a genius, a ‘financial genius,’ in his day. ‘Genius’ is cheap in finance, so it seems. He gambled with other people’s money — most of us could do the same if we hadn’t scruples.

Aldis expected to get something out of De Jarnac — I'm not quite clear even now what it was; and De Jarnac made himself agreeable and proposed again. The gov'nor had refused him once in Italy. The man behaved quite decently in his own way; there was no fuss; he took his refusals like a gentleman, even if he made them like a fool. De Jarnac, however, was no fool. Mother says he was just like a chap at cards — poker for choice. He was a first-class loser. After his visit he lay low for six months; seemed to regard the business as settled and no more said. He travelled and we lost sight of him. When the smash came he showed his hand — and won. That's the outline of it."

"Joan is abroad?" I asked.

"There's the difficulty."

I looked at Roy and he at me.

"Surely you know to whom and to where —"

"She has been sold?" Roy had finished my passionate exclamation.

"Put it that way — if you must," I parried lamely.

"We put it that way from the first, you will remember."

He was right. These Gariochs had not spared themselves — least of all themselves!

"Where is Joan?" I asked as gently as I could.

Roy was looking hard at me, measuring me, head and heel, with those cold eyes of his — cold in that hour, though often before I had known them shed a softness unapproachable. Was I man enough? he seemed to probe for and to ask.

"Where is Joan?" I said less gently.

"I don't know — none of us know," from Roy at last.

I stared at them — at him, at Noll, at Fergus.

"Why not?" said I.

"That's the worst part of this whole hellish business!" Roy steadied himself. "They were married last December, at Garioch," he pursued; "a quiet wedding—nobody there except ourselves, a friend or two of his, — De Jarnac must be somebody in his own country, judging by the way they treated him, — and the servants. He had no relations worth mentioning, he said. From Garioch they went to London. They were going on to Paris and then south to Avignon and the Château Jarnac — at least, so he had said. Joan wrote from the London hotel at which they stopped and sent a message from Dover, and since then we have had nothing from him or her but this."

"This" was a letter folded in an envelope that bore a blue French stamp.

"May I read it?" I asked.

"We want you to."

De Jarnac had written in French: —

"Do not expect to hear from us again; at your peril do not seek for us; I have paid for my treasure and it is mine. I love Joan and no harm will come to her; of that you may rest assured. She is aware of my resolution, and will, I trust, spare me the pain and annoyance of enforcing it. I have the means of enforcing it; of that she is also aware. This is the last that you will ever hear of either of us. In the future remember that: '*Il n'y a plus une Comtesse de Jarnac; il n'y a plus un Comte de Jarnac!*' "

This was what Joan's husband had written in French.

"There is no longer a Countess de Jarnac; there is no longer a Count de Jarnac," I said aloud, and then, "What answer did you make to this?"

"We have written to him at the address he gave in Paris;

we have written to the Château Jarnac near Avignon," from Roy.

"And what happened?"

"Nothing."

"Did your letters come back?"

"No."

"You wrote more than once?"

"Three times in all to both places, and the second and third times we registered."

"Nothing came back?"

"Nothing."

Roy waited for me to continue. He made no suggestion, but he waited. A man left one of the big arm-chairs next the fireplace. We had the smoke room to ourselves.

"Have any of you been to Paris or to Avignon?" was my next question.

"We have no right," was the grim answer; "do you understand, Jim, *we have no right?*"

"Did he stipulate for that before the wedding?"

"No; but I ask you — have we?"

"I have," I said at last.

Roy's eyes were full on mine. Now came *his* turn.

"You will go to Avignon, to the Château Jarnac, and to the address he gave in Paris?"

"Certainly."

"You will find your way to Joan?"

"If there be a way."

"You will do what we, her father, and what we, her brothers, may not do?"

"More than that, Roy," said I.

He smiled, and, indeed, as I think of it, he could afford to smile. There was little that Roy would have shrunk

from, hot or cold, deliberately or with the blood in his face; and now, he, pacing the smoke room of the Junior Rag with that light in his eyes, looked caged but nobly savage. Had he been free, this story would have taken a different turn — so much was clear and open. And Noll and Fergus shared his quality. Short shrift for De Jarnac had these three broke for him!

"That will be enough," Roy had said. "You understand — we cannot move in this? We have sold our right to move. Joan is no longer ours."

"I go home first," was my reply; "mother and the sisters have a claim. You see this? To-morrow I go down to Lympne; perhaps they'll make me stay a week or two — but after that I travel."

We four were in the street again. They walked with me as far as my hotel, and then I with them to the house in Portland Place, then back again and back once more, and back again for the third time. It was late when we said good night. I had promised to leave England quietly, without a word as to my purpose, as soon as I had spent some weeks with my dear parents and the others. As soon as I could reasonably go, I would be on the trail of this De Jarnac and see what injury and what mortal wrong had overtaken my brave girl.

CHAPTER V

LYMPNE — we pronounce it Lym — was full of memories. I spent my childhood there; there I grew up. Joan had stayed with us in the old house — castle they call it, and castle it used to be; an ancient place, built by the Normans, of Kentish rag, that hard gray stone which people quarry to this day. Kent is ribbed with it. The house stands on a bluff, high above Romney Marsh. They say the sea washed to its foot in the old days, when Romney Marsh was not. Hythe was a seaport then, and Winchelsea, and Rye. To-day the sea is a good hour's walk from there. From the battlemented terrace you look out upon it and the marsh. On stormy days it is hard to tell which is the more gloomy and forbidding, the vast gray marsh or the immensity beyond. On days before a deal of rain the air becomes transparent, and, miles away, you see the coast of France, white in the sunlight, and even houses and a harbour.

Below the castle is a wood and beyond that the canal, a waterway dug against Napoleon when his troops were at Boulogne. On the sea's edge, one to every mile or so, runs a long chain of Martello towers, right along that coast. Napoleon cost the country these as well. My grandfather remembered the building of them and the guns that came down the canal to make them formidable. Often had Joan and I strayed out to these deserted forts, tramping cheerfully over the loose shingle, finding a bunch

of yellow sea-poppies for her belt, starting a hare or flushing the snipe that sometimes made a haunt of the great marsh. To-day I was alone.

My mother knew the best part of Joan's story; my father made no fuss. He was for philosophy, and to hear him, one woman might be as good as another or even better. I stayed with them till waiting hurt; rowing my sisters down the canal, evading the welcomes of a dozen friends who wished to make me hero, where, had they but seen aright, little of heroism had they discovered in my torn heart. There were parties at Westenhanger, at Saltwood, and Sandling Park; my sisters made me take them, and showed me off, perhaps, to other sisters less fortunate. In Hythe, the neighbouring town, Fordred the barber, I discovered, had cut my picture out of an illustrated paper and pinned it up in his saloon; Miss Cobay welcomed me at the White Hart, masterful as ever amid her little court — her father had died meanwhiles and the inn was hers; all the old faces — Wilks the town clerk, Murdoch the doctor, Drake the coroner — were there as usual. Nothing had changed but I. They asked me to take the cricket team if I stayed on. No, I was not staying on, but going abroad for a bit, and in July my leave would be over.

I dwell on these things. They were sharp and clear at the time. Sharpest and clearest of all, the pain I felt watching the starlight and the marsh from those old battlemented walls. She had stood there once, her hand in mine; there my lips first touched hers, she, wondering and reluctant, yet compelled. The light had flashed out at Dungeness, the great light at Grisnez, the green and red of ships beating down Channel with masthead light above.

Wonderful days and nights, — soft with midsummer, indolent, luxurious, small shelter from those blazing suns, — the nights scented, and the moonlight making a vision of those magic waters and the outspread marsh. She at my side, dear as some boy companion, innocent as a child, never wearied. My arms had closed round her and she was woman. Woman at the last, enfolding me in a rare tenderness that made no secret of its hopes and its completed faith.

My pen carries me forward as I write of her, and it is difficult to stop. My tongue has long been silent. Until now I have borne my pain alone, till in these pages, written for her, to her, I have found a voice.

Halfway through May I was in Paris. Roy had come down for the week end and to see me off. As far as Boulogne he came, and there we said good-by. A crowded train, a hot journey, is all I remember; and then the cab that took me to our old hotel. Hôtel du Perigord, Rue de Grammont, it is, near the opera and the great boulevards, yet in a quiet street. I came unrecognised. It was here that she had stayed with her parents, and Sir Alison and Lady Garioch had let us pretty well alone. It was evening when I arrived, too late for action. I had the address of the house near the Parc Monceau. In the directory I could find no Comte de Jarnac; and as to the house, it seemed divided between two tenants. One was a doctor with the German name of Nachtigal; the other was Louis Prévost, a painter whose reputation is well known.

I had dined, I had my directions for the following day; there was nothing to do but sit outside a café on the great boulevards before turning in for the night. It was here I thought of young Croisnel who had been attached to the

Embassy at Albert Gate. There would be no difficulty in finding *him*. Strangely enough I had all but forgotten his existence in those three weeks.

The next morning was fine but gusty. I had to hold my hat on as the cab made its way to De Jarnac's address in Paris. The house stands not so very far from the Madeleine, in a garden and with an iron railing round about. In this Haussmannised part of the town it was imposing, an enviable possession in a quarter of endless flats with never a green space showing in between. The second of its two stories, judging by the abundance of glass, must contain the studio of the celebrated painter.

I entered the garden, mounted the steps that led to the front door, and made my choice. Two bell-pulls were on my right and two names in little frames beside them. I resolved first of all to send in my card to Dr. Nachtigal.

It was ten o'clock in the morning and he was at home. I was shown into a waiting room. The man-servant came back and said that perhaps in a quarter of an hour his master would be ready to attend to me. I slipped a louis in his hand. "I am not a patient," I said. "I come on an important business."

Five minutes later the doctor himself stood before me.

I looked him over carefully, and, but for the fact that he was surprisingly young for a man evidently possessed of an important practice and position, I at once felt sure that here certainly was not the Count de Jarnac.

"Monsieur is English," he said, holding out my card, "but monsieur speaks French?"

"Or German — whichever you prefer."

"In Rome we will do as the Romans do," said he, and offered me a chair.

"You will see from my card," I began, "that I am an English officer. I have been away from Europe these last two years — in South Africa. A dear friend of mine used to live here" — I was watching him closely — "a Comtesse de Jarnac, and I had hoped to find her still at this address. You have no information?"

He understood me perfectly. He was either very well instructed or else a man of quick perceptions, as was most likely, considering his profession.

"I am a newcomer in this house," he said, "but, perhaps, Monsieur Prévost upstairs —"

"You have never heard the name before?"

"Never," he said; "but two years, in these days, it is a long time. I have only been here since the autumn."

It was impossible to ask more. He seemed to have done his best for me. He was certainly not the Count de Jarnac, for, remembering Roy's description, he was neither tall, nor expansive, nor particularly good looking. Rather, he was stout, of middle height, with a hearty bourgeois manner, and a thick brown beard. Also, his accent betrayed the German, unmistakably.

I climbed to the next floor, discussing these matters.

Louis Prévost, so the maid informed me, was in his studio on the floor above. He always rose at daybreak "so as to catch the light," she said. I had not come for an autograph, or "*pour émbeter le Maître?*" had I?

"For neither," I replied.

One was never sure, she said, and, though I looked so serious, I might be a *farceur* like an American gentleman who called the other day and wasted the Master's whole morning, "simply to put an article in the newspapers,"

she cried indignantly; "he might have come in the evening when the light was gone!"

I handed her my card.

If I would wait, she said, she herself would take my card up to the Master. The Master had a model, but perhaps the model needed a rest, and the Master usually took a sandwich and a glass of wine at this hour.

She was a voluble buxom person, who spoke her mind, apparently. After a brief interval she led me upstairs to the Master himself. The model had drawn a cloak over her shoulders and was discussing coffee and a cigarette.

CHAPTER VI

LOUIS PRÉVOST, apparently, was used to uninvited callers from abroad, and was, moreover, like his maid-servant, a person who had small use for ceremony.

Again I told my story and asked after my dear friend the Comtesse de Jarnac.

"Was she a blonde?" asked the Master.

"No, she is dark," said I.

The Master seemed infinitely relieved and proceeded to explain his reasons for the question.

"I am not an impertinent," he said, "but this is my theory: blondes are no good; they have neither wit nor common sense; they waste one's time, the glorious years that one should give to work; and at the end, what are they? Nothing! *Des poupées, Monsieur!* Dolls with big eyes that promise everything and give nothing! They — but I see that monsieur has come here to inquire after a brunette."

"After Madame la Comtesse de Jarnac," I interposed.

The Master had not heard the name before — never in his life had he heard the name before — it was extraordinary! He had lived here uninterruptedly for twelve years — uninterruptedly! he repeated with emphasis; for he never left Paris except in August. Paris was not fit for a dog in August. "Every one has a right to leave Paris in August," he insisted, "but the other eleven months one does not budge. Nothing will make me budge!" he con-

cluded; and then, suddenly calling to mind an exceptional year wherein this fixed principle of his had met with a reverse, "*Tiens!*" he cried, "one winter I was at Monte Carlo. Has monsieur ever been to Monte Carlo? *Ho-la-la!*"

In the face of a master of this kind, what could one do but smile? Still, I was able to keep him to my point and to my purpose — in his own fashion, I admit, but the two were there.

"And Dr. Nachtigal," I asked, "do you think he might know?" for I had my suspicions of this Dr. Nachtigal.

The Master could not say. The doctor was a German, a dirty German, and the less one had to do with those fellows, the better. The Master knew nothing at all about him, and did not want to know anything. He had been too young to fight in the last war, but if there were another! "Let them come!" he cried. The Master, apparently, was ready for them. "But as for Madame la Comtesse—" he pursued.

"De Jarnac," I put in.

"As for Madame la Comtesse de Jarnac," said he, "my regrets are infinite, but, until to-day, I have never even heard that lady's name; but perhaps monsieur, having come so far, would like to make a tour of the studio? Monsieur is interested in painting, *hein?*"

Monsieur submitted. A refusal would have been impolite, possibly impolitic. It was my business to make a friend of the Master rather than to wound him by a display of our Britannic coolness. But first I must share his sandwiches and drink a glass of wine. "*Et toi aussi*" — and thou also — he said to the model who filled our tumblers. He drank to my health and to that of the Coun-

tess who was a brunette. "Beware of blondes," he cried; "they give you nothing and they waste your time. One lives but once," he added sagely, "and one has work to do. Your health, Monsieur," and the Master himself refilled our tumblers.

Round the studio we went, and here, I admit, Louis Prévost was in his element. The model followed us with cigarettes — my host asked pardon for the omission — while I was led from easel to easel, the artist explaining to me on the way that his one passion was "Light!"

"*La lumière — toujours la lumière!*" he said. Light and the human figure revealed by light, that was his creed. The English had their Pre-Raphaelites, *leur Rossetti, leur Burne-Jones* — away with the Pre-Raphaelites! What did they know about light! They were dreamers, imbeciles who had lost themselves in a vision of the unreal! For close on an hour he held me there, and when he led me downstairs to the front door, a hand paternally on my shoulder, he had forgotten all about the Comtesse de Jarnac and had invited me cordially to come again. "Whenever you are in Paris," he said, "and, above all, no compliments. It has been an agreeable break in the long hours to converse with a monsieur of so high an intelligence." And so we both came to our *au revoirs*.

It was a ridiculous ending to the first step of my mission. I could not help laughing aloud over it, and I could even see Roy's smile when, later, I should describe to him how the Master had engulfed me. At the garden gate was a tiny lodge. "What an ass I've been!" I exclaimed at the sight of it. For this tiny lodge betokened the presence of a concierge, that indispensable adjunct to every Parisian house; and the concierge was, of course, the person of all

persons who would be able to throw light on the object of my quest.

I entered the little house and the concierge was there.

"Has not a Count de Jarnac lived here a short time ago, before Monsieur *le Docteur* Nachtigal, perhaps?" I asked.

The concierge reflected, he even went so far as to consult an account book, slowly, deliberately, with the unhurried movements of a peasant. He had a countryman's face and stoop, small eyes that twinkled with all a peasant's cunning, and when he spoke, I saw that his teeth were missing.

"De Jarnac, no," he mumbled at last; "Lapérouse, yes; and Madame de Maurepas, a widow with two daughters. Before these," and he turned another page of his book, "there was Déteindre, an artist, and the Baron Lémire. That is in twenty years, and I can go no farther." He closed his book and waited.

The man was clearly a peasant, with the fixed mind of peasants. He answered my questions and no more, like a backward schoolboy or a corporal.

"You know nothing at all of a Count de Jarnac?" I repeated.

"Surely not, Monsieur."

I gave him a coin and went my way. So far this quest seemed hopeless. Before leaving those iron railings and the little lodge, I turned to take a last look at the house. On the first floor of entry was the suite of Dr. Nachtigal, below it would be cellars or lumber rooms; on the first floor dwelt Louis Prévost, and above that was a story accounted for by the abundant glass of his studio. Other windows were there as well; his servants would, in all probability, occupy these rooms. No, it was hopeless.

Unless De Croisnel could put me on a new trail, I would leave for Avignon by the evening train.

The simplest means of finding this young gentleman, it occurred to me, would be by calling in at the British Embassy. There they would be sure to have news of him, for the diplomatic bodies of almost every country are like one huge family, and usually know where each member of their tribe is to be found. Croisnel who, two years ago, had been fairly prominent in London would certainly be well known to the secretaries of our Embassy in Paris.

Croisnel was in Petersburg. So Mr. Vivian Ducie, the third secretary, informed me, and I thanked Providence that he had not been shifted to Pekin or to some other capital equally remote. If Avignon failed, I would go to Petersburg — or even to Pekin for that matter.

Mr. Ducie had no knowledge of a friend of De Croisnel's, a Comte de Jarnac, was my next inquiry.

None at all. But, wait a moment — had not a daughter of Sir Alison Garioch married a Frenchman of that name? Mr. Vivian Ducie had heard about it, a few months back, in London.

"You don't know this Monsieur de Jarnac?" said I.

"No," said he.

"Nor anybody who does?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"If you could hear anything about him and let me know of it, I'd be obliged."

Mr. Vivian Ducie both was and looked astonished, if anybody so diplomatically correct can be or look anything so undiplomatically incorrect.

"I'm just back from the war — been out two years — and I've rather lost track of people," I explained.

My presumption was excused.

"Jolly good fun for you," said Mr. Vivian Ducie, suddenly grown intimate, "but deuced rough on us. We've had to stay here, and that war's made us so jolly unpopular — why, even *I* have felt like taking my coat off to 'em once or twice; and when it comes to the women cutting you, — good-looking women, too — 'pon my word, I'd sooner be in South Africa! Jolly good fun for you soldiers, I say, but deuced rough on us."

"Well, you diplomats started the fun, didn't you?" I ventured to remind him.

"So we did; so we did," he chuckled; "and if I come across the De Jarnacs or anybody who knows of them, I'll send you word."

I thanked him and wrote down my address.

Back in the hotel again, I thought of a second scheme, which would make it doubly certain that neither Dr. Nachtigal nor the concierge had deceived me. Louis Prévost, the Master, I put out of court. He was incapable of a secret, still more so of a conspiracy; one could not even suspect so frank a creature of anything sinister or underhand; and besides, his reputation, European in extent, was against any such possibility or partnership. But these two others, though each had been quite plausible, it seemed remotely possible that they had lied to me. The Count de Jarnac — had he not proved it — was enormously rich, and for money one can purchase most things, lies quite easily. Roy's registered letters, I pondered, had been taken in at that house, but Roy himself had been unable to follow up this clew and evidence. I was free. I myself would post a registered letter directed to the Count de Jarnac at the address near the Parc Mon-

ceau and would take a receipt for it. I would not do so at once, for that might arouse suspicion. First of all, I would go to Avignon, to the Château Jarnac, and see what was to be seen and heard in that quarter. I would not post my letter in Avignon, for that too might arouse suspicion. If Avignon proved a blank, I would send it from Paris, and in Paris too I would, perhaps, sit tight and await the result; or, perhaps, I might cross Europe to St. Petersburg and there take counsel of Monsieur de Croisnel.

CHAPTER VII

THE journey to Avignon, or so much as I remember of it, was a long night in the train interrupted by halts at mysterious places where names were called aloud from out the dimness of nocturnal stations. Here and there a passenger disturbed us, entering or disappearing with a singular certainty, considering the hour. In England such excursions into dark or dawn are barely known. Had it not been for a large party of British tourists, who, conducted by an agency, were *en route* to Marseilles and a steam yacht that was to take them Heaven knows where in the Near East, the train would have been comfortable and three parts empty. Without these tourists I might have slept till I was wakened, but there they were, filling almost every carriage of the crowded train. One of them I remember vividly, a dark girl who said she came from Edinburgh. In some indistinct way she resembled my dear Joan. It might have been a note in the voice, or the confident good fellowship wherewith she accepted my place in a first-class carriage. I had come upon her snug in her rugs and curled up on the floor of the common passageway. An officious underling was seeking to eject her. I offered her my place and the episode was ended. But her schoolboy French, and, in default of better, to curl herself up in her rugs and go to sleep upon the floor — there was my Joan, just such an improvisation as she might have made. It was early morning when we came to Avignon.

The broken night was little novelty to me after two years of continuous service on the veldt. At the station I found an hotel omnibus and drove through the waking town. I had never been here before, and had it not been for the serious nature of my mission, this drive under the clear blue sky of the south would have been a pleasure hardly measurable. It was in the month of May, when spring is green and exquisite and filled with tenderness. A bath, and I was out-of-doors again. It was too early to ask questions. On that May morning I crossed a bridge and wandered for a mile beside the Rhone, happy or nearly happy; for nature is a physician and consoler difficult to banish utterly. And I was young, in the first flush of manhood — yes, I was almost happy.

On the river bank are several restaurants. If ever you go to Avignon, you must look for one inscribed "Au Rendezvous des Gourmets." I suppose it was the flourish of this proud name which made me venture on a chair and table. Here in the open I sat down to coffee, rolls, and oranges, followed by a cigarette. No other "Gourmet" was abroad at this good hour. What with the river, the blue sky, and balmy airs, it was as fine a breakfast as any I have eaten. The restaurateur, and even his dog, waited upon me; madame, his wife, joined them, all three astonished to find a customer so early in the day and eager to do their best for him. They came from these parts, had lived here all their lives.

Then they would know the Château Jarnac, not so far from here?

Certainly they knew it. The château was on the main road, after one had crossed the old bridge, and about ten kilometres distant. They had often passed it; but of

the owner and the owner's family they knew nothing. He was not a person of great importance, they said; he could not be, or else one would have heard more of him.

I thanked them for their hospitality, gave a spare lump of sugar to the dog, and paid my score.

In the town I bought a large map of the district and found the Château Jarnac marked upon it just as they had said. For an hour I wrote letters; to my parents first — and Heaven forgive me my deceit in this — I wrote to them as though I had been a tourist, like those others I had met with in the train. A second letter was to Roy, informing him of what had happened in Paris, and this one I kept by me in the hope that before nightfall I would be able to add a postscript more substantial than the failures which were all I could record. At eleven o'clock I lunched, and by midday I was out of the hotel and well on the straight white road whose tenth kilometre would furnish me with my first glimpse of the Château Jarnac.

I remember that walk perfectly, and how I had decided to go on foot in preference to hiring any such incumbrance as a carriage; I remember the dust that coated my brown shoes, the vineyards and the fig trees on the way, the tall funereal cypresses, the short and bushy ones; the stout priest I passed, and an automobile, then rather rarer than to-day. I had an orange with me to quench my thirst, and this I sucked at the eighth kilometre. I counted them as they went by, and, to make sure, notched each one off upon my walking-stick. At the tenth I put my pocket-knife away, knocked the ashes out of my pipe, and began to look about me. A peasant came by, and him I stopped. The Château Jarnac was there — there where

one saw a chimney and a roof of slate between the poplars to one's right.

"The chimney with the smoke?" I asked.

"But yes," said he; and added, "Monsieur is a friend of the count?"

"An acquaintance, nothing more," was my reply.

He did not speak, but tapped his wrinkled forehead, then ambled onward down the road.

Either he meant that I must be mad, or else he was referring to Joan's husband. Could the Count de Jarnac really be half-witted? Surely here was no hideous and doubly tragic sequel to that marriage, already sufficiently tragic in itself? In England De Jarnac had not been mad; or else he had displayed a more than lunatic cunning; enough, at the least, to deceive a host of watchers. For Roy had said nothing, nor, apparently, suspected anything so vile, and certainly it was incredible that they would have given Joan over to a person thus half human. The count had probably lost his reason here in France. But, perhaps, it was absurd to argue on such evidence, the irresponsible gesture of a chance-met peasant, who might himself be what he had so easily described.

The château, a modest enough country-seat when one came up to it, stood well back from the highway and was approached by an avenue of poplars that opened to a garden full of flowers. I reconnoitred before entering, and discovered an orange grove to the rear, and beyond that a meadow which contained a cow. It was all very simple, very natural. The place was not well kept, nor was it ill kept. As I stole from point to point, seeking for some sign of its human tenants, I discovered an old gentleman who carried a sunshade, while, with his left

hand, he clutched and flourished a volume bound in red. I drew closer, taking advantage of such shelter as came my way. He was reciting aloud from the volume, and with it he strode into the field which contained the cow. To this reflective beast he declaimed a whole passage. I listened, and it was Shakespeare done into French.

"To be or not to be," he cried, and then, approaching nearer to the cow, "*voilà la question.*" And so forth. This old gentleman it must be whom the peasant had described to me as mad. Perhaps he was De Jarnac's father.

There was no one else in the field, so I left my hiding-place, came forward quite frankly, and raised my hat.

"Have I the honour of addressing the Count de Jarnac?" I asked.

"The same and no other," said he, putting his book aside and clutching the parasol, which he now grasped bayonet-wise, with both hands, as though ready to use it as a weapon or as a shield. "Jarnac de Jarnac," he cried quite fiercely, and with a savage lunge at some imaginary foeman in mid-air.

"I have come from England," I attempted, but he was busy with his wounded adversary. This poor creature evidently lay prostrate upon the grass, and till the old gentleman had given him another prod or two, and finished him off with a vicious kick in the stomach, I must stay out in the cold. At last the combat was over.

"I have come from England," I repeated; "I am an acquaintance of your son and an old friend of your daughter-in-law."

At this he lowered his parasol and fairly shrieked with laughter.

"Continue," said he, between the gasps; "you are perhaps Polonius; or will you be the Ghost? Ha, you will be the Ghost!" he cried, picking up the book that he had cast upon the ground. "*Tiens*, I will crow, and then you must disappear."

With that the old gentleman emitted a loud and sonorous "Cock-a-doodle-doo"; the cow gave us a look of mild astonishment; and I acquitted the peasant of all treachery or exaggeration. The Count de Jarnac — or, at least, this Count de Jarnac — was mad as any hatter, was Lincoln, Bennett, Scott, and Gibus rolled in one.

"Your son, monsieur the count, and your daughter-in-law are, perhaps, indoors?" said I.

"Nonsense," said he; and then, "I am rather mad, but I am not quite so mad as all that! I am only mad nor' nor' east, as your Hamlet says. Wait, I will show you the passage."

I declined to be shown the passage; I knew the passage quite well. I declined to be shown anything or to listen to anything until he had told me where I could find his son or else his daughter-in-law.

"You have a hard heart, Monsieur," he then exclaimed, "*comme tous les Anglais* — like all the English," he repeated, and would not say another word.

"Your son and your daughter-in-law are in the house?" I persisted.

He sulked and took no notice of my question.

I put it to him again.

He grew exasperated, and then at last: "I have no son and no daughter-in-law; I am an old man and I am childless; I am unmarried and no one would ever marry me;" and with that he burst into a passion of tears.

I left him sobbing and walked towards the house. I felt something of a brute and a bully as I turned away from him; but when I had reached the orange grove I looked back, and there he was, with sunshade and with book, a-dancing blissfully and merrily around the cow.

CHAPTER VIII

LIFE is a tragedy, a farce, a dream. As I look backward on these two encounters, — the first with Louis Prévost in his studio, the second with this old gentleman in his field, — what would you have me do but laugh at them? At the worst they were lessons, mocking, ironical, and filled with cynicism; at the best they taught me that acceptance, a humble submission to life's strange disorder, is the prime condition whereby man can keep order in himself. In most books — even in many conversations I have held — I find this dispensation shirked or hurried out of sight; from cover to cover there is an heroic roaring, as though this earth were peopled exclusively with lions and did not harbour maniacs declaiming Shakespeare to a cow. But I am writing down the truth, even for her dear eyes, and though there will be tragedy enough and dream enough within these pages, the farce that went with them is real to me and just as inextinguishable as these so other and more splendid things. So in this history, if farce must enter, it will not be shirked or forced obscurely out of sight. A book, I take it, is something like a house; the stronger and more honestly you build, the longer will it flourish and endure.

But to continue. From the old gentleman in his field, I had gone on warily to the orange grove. It was deserted and full of scent and shadow, a cool and grateful place in the afternoon heat. I left it behind me and came

to a lawn that led to the rear of the château. Not a soul was visible, not so much as a cat. The tall French windows on the ground floor of the house were open, and through one of these I stepped into a room. Empty! I tried a second room. It was a *salon*, with old-fashioned and faded furniture, a white marble chimney-place, and several cabinets against the wall. A glass chandelier hung from the ceiling, stuck full of candles that drooped with the day's heat. On the carpet below them were grease spots everywhere. Some one was snoring. I followed the sound to a recess, a kind of a large alcove curtained off from where I stood; and there, stretched out at full length, his couch two sofas placed edgewise and a chair, I found a shaggy savage fast asleep upon his back. He snored with the regularity of a clock, of a regiment of soldiers on the march; every time he breathed he snored. A rough-looking fellow and roughly dressed he was, with a flat nose, and eyes set wide apart upon his hairy face. I did not wake him, but passed out through the door into a narrow passage that ended in a hall. Here was the main entrance to the house. A table laden with lamps and candlesticks stood on one side; to my left were pegs from which hung hats and overcoats. A staircase, evidently leading to the upper floors of the château, was also here.

I was about to continue my search, when, coming more closely to the table with the lamps, I discovered three envelopes, open and addressed in a familiar hand. Two of them bore the blue cross and stamps of registration, the third was plain. They were stained with overflow of oil from the lamps, they were dirty and dusty; but there they were, as if opened, then carelessly tossed aside,

their contents being of small account. The two registered envelopes were addressed in Sir Alison's writing, on the other I recognised the fine penmanship and precise characters of Lady Garioch. Inside of each was a letter, crumpled and misused, as though taken out and then thrust back again by some indifferent and brutal hand. I smoothed these out, refolded them, and placed them back unread. Well enough I knew what was in them! On the registered envelopes the superscription was to the Count de Jarnac, on the plain one to the Countess.

I had barely made this discovery when I looked up and found a woman watching me. She stood one foot inside the hall, the other in the passage, as though afraid and ready to bolt at a moment's warning. She was plainly dressed, much like a peasant's wife or working-woman. As I raised my head and saw her there, she ran away. She returned a moment after, sheltering herself behind the hairy savage whom I had last seen snoring on his back in the *salon* next the lawn. Even now he was only half awake.

"These letters," I said, holding the three envelopes in my hand and advancing towards this singular couple, "they are addressed to the Count de Jarnac. They are opened. Is he here?"

I spoke sternly, in French, and the woman tried to answer me.

"The young count," I added, "not the old gentleman whom I have already seen."

The woman tried to answer me, but the bearded savage, now fast awakening, swept her to one side.

"*Nyet*," he said, speaking in some unknown language, and motioned me to be gone.

I put Sir Alison's and Lady Garioch's letters carefully away in my pocket.

"I want Jean Robert, Count de Jarnac," I said, "and madame his countess."

But all the answer I got for my pains was that incomprehensible monosyllable, "*Nyet*," repeated growlingly, threateningly, from out his hairy face.

My patience went at last. Addressing the woman, "You will tell him that I am going to search this house," I said, "and that he must either stand aside or be my conductor."

She, however, shook her head. "I cannot talk to him," she began, and then he silenced her.

I couldn't talk to him, either. I tried him with all my languages, German, English, French — it was no good.

I moved towards him, and he struck an attitude, ridiculous, futile, if meant to be a posture of offence. I gave him one between the eyes and a second on the chin point which lifted him and sent him sprawling on the floor. He lay there like some hurt dog, reproachful, ignorant, nonplussed, as though wondering why one master should upset the orders of another. What he said, I could not understand, and at last he had become quite talkative, but it was clear from his manner that he had only obeyed instructions, faithfully and dumbly, given to him by some person who paid wages. Though he and I could not exchange a word, I was sure that he had been placed there by Joan's husband. The fellow, despite his size, was in no way dangerous. An ordinary Tommy would have beaten the life out of him. I gave him the chance of rising and having another go at me, but he had had enough. He lay there on the ground, nursing his head, and when

I spoke to him, persisted in his fatuous exclamation, "Nyet!"

The staircase was on our left, and there were sitting rooms all round us. Ordering the woman to follow me, I began a tour of the whole house. The man rose to his feet as we went off and prepared to join us. I raised my stick at him, and away he slunk like some whipped cur.

"Has he any weapons?" I asked.

The woman did not believe he had; she had seen none at least.

"Is there anybody else in the house?"

"Only we three: monsieur the count who is mad, and that animal who guards him and who comes from Heaven knows where, and I who am paid by the month."

"Who pays you?"

"Formerly monsieur the count, now Alexandre — we call that great brute Alexandre. I have been with monsieur the count for ten years and my mother was here before me. Ten times I have threatened to go," she ran on, "but the poor count is all alone, and each time he begs of me, he sheds tears, he implores. Though he is mad, he has a good heart," she ended.

"He has no children?"

"Heaven preserve us!" she cried.

"You have never seen any one else here besides Alexandre and the count?"

"No one."

"No one at all?" I insisted. "Think well before you answer."

"I have seen nobody. One day there were visitors and I was sent to Avignon. I know there were visitors because Madame Duprat who lives in the village saw them;

and another day Alexandre locked me in my room for a whole afternoon and turned the key. I could see nothing from the windows, for he closed the shutters on me as well. But I heard voices, and Alexandre was speaking too."

"Men's voices?"

"But certainly."

"No woman's voice?"

"What should a woman do here?" she asked.

It was no use questioning her any further, nor was there much value in such evidence as she could furnish. That she had never set eyes on my dear Joan was certain; for who, having seen or heard her, could forget?

Right through the empty house we went, she and I, Alexandre snarling and muttering at a safe distance, always on our heels and just like the dog I have described him.

Not a sign did I come across, nothing, nothing, that could give me any clew or trace of my poor girl. The rooms were fairly clean, — the woman, evidently, attended to this, — they were simply furnished, from roof to entresol there was nothing to be discovered except the three letters and their envelopes, and these I could account for far too easily.

Alexandre had taken them in, the woman said. He could not write himself, so he had made the count sign the papers. "He enjoyed it," she ran on; "he is always ready to put his name and titles to any piece of paper, that poor count! Harmless as a child, but quite incapable of affairs." One could not do other than like him, she continued, and he was a pleasant change from Alexandre, whom they both feared. But the wages were high; she was a poor woman; and what could one do when one was

poor but take the best that the good God sent to one? "When I saw monsieur strike Alexandre like that," she finished, "I was sure that monsieur was a gentleman, and I was no longer afraid of monsieur."

With a heavy heart I said good-by to her at last, gave her a little present, and set my face towards the town of Avignon. De Jarnac had been right when he had written to Joan's parents. "*Il n'y a plus un Comte de Jarnac*," he had said; "*il n'y a plus une Comtesse de Jarnac*" — there is no longer a Count de Jarnac; there is no longer a Countess de Jarnac. He and Joan had vanished as utterly as though neither had ever been.

I lingered on in Avignon and even took a short trip to Marseilles; for I wanted at least a week to go by before I posted my registered letter in Paris which I intended to follow up in person at the house with the iron railings near the Parc Monceau.

CHAPTER IX

DURING the week wherein I cooled my heels at the Hôtel des Étrangers in Avignon, — I still recall its shady courtyard and the stout head-waiter who looked so like a low comedian, — I mentioned the name De Jarnac whenever I had a chance. Even at Marseilles I spoke of my acquaintance with the count, rarely starting a conversation into which his name and title did not enter, and always alert for the echo which I hoped for and so very seldom found. People, perhaps, thought me boastful or a snob, — I am, Heaven knows, little of either, — but no one, and very few at that, had heard of any other Count de Jarnac than the old gentleman whose eccentricities have sometimes made me smile and were so unexpected and ridiculous a climax to my hot descent upon him. He was poor, people said, and no one troubled about him. Why should they? To them he was nothing but a harmless imbecile, and his name stood for no more than a foolish joke at which one laughed. My journey back to Paris was undertaken by day, and this time there was no herd of British tourists to fill the train and make us all uncomfortable.

That very evening and immediately after my arrival, I set about the preparation of a registered letter addressed to the Count Jean Robert de Jarnac. If no such person as the Count de Jarnac was known at the house, the letter would be refused and the postal authorities would return it to the address of the sender at the Hôtel du Périgord,

Rue de Grammont. If the letter was accepted at the house, then I would go back there armed with my receipt and get what satisfaction I could out of those who had lied to me a week before. I wrote a serious letter that the postal authorities would be sure to return to me, and I sealed the envelope with a seal that could not be tampered with or broken without my knowledge, our own seal of the flaming heart with its appropriate motto "Avec Tendresse." Early next morning I handed this letter in at a post-office and took my receipt. Unlike Roy and his brothers, I was free to follow up what I had written and to demand an answer from the wretches that were hiding our poor Joan.

I had left Avignon on a Sunday, so this was a Monday. The postal authorities of all countries being notoriously slow to act, I would wait till Thursday before going to the house.

My letter despatched, I killed an hour or two at the Louvre and then called in at the British Embassy and sent up my card to Mr. Vivian Ducie who had treated me so well before, and who to-day not only received me very civilly, but asked me to take luncheon with him into the bargain. Beaumont, another secretary, joined us, but not a word had either of De Jarnac or his wife. They had never met him. Ducie even, good chap, had made inquiries, and had been unable to trace either De Jarnac or his English countess. "Devilish queer," said he, "now, isn't it?"

I admitted its queerness and asked after young Croisnel.

"A wild beggar," so they described him, Ducie seemingly with a touch of envy, and certainly with additions and variations on this vaguely festive term.

Croisnel, it appeared, had got into a scrape in London,

something to do with a supper party after licensed hours at Lombardi's in Jermyn Street, and had had to leave. The French Foreign Office had passed him on to Petersburg, — he had a strong political and social backing, evidently, — “and in Petersburg licensed hours are unknown and one can sup in comfort,” said Ducie, with a laugh.

Both men were amused at the affair; such stories, I gathered, were the small talk of their trade and rather welcome in the cosmopolitan circles they frequented.

“De Croisnel's all right,” said Beaumont; “look at half the chaps they send us — you in England,” he added, as though I were part to blame; “stuck up little asses like Dampier, who's also at Petersburg, or else serious little prigs from Oxford with a title and nothing else. We're overrun with that sort till they marry, and there's an end of 'em. Usually marry money, too; the service doubles the market value of 'em,” he laughed. “I suppose that's why most of 'em go into it.”

Mr. Vivian Ducie grinned and nodded in agreement.

“When I was in Peru,” he began; “not many heiresses running wild there nor in Uruguay, either.”

“It's when they come home and take a holiday, my boy,” said Beaumont, interrupting.

“Rum way of spending a holiday,” commented Mr. Ducie.

“Well, you can't expect the girls to come to Uruguay.”

“No, by Jove,” said Mr. Ducie; “not a hotel fit for 'em in the place.”

“And Peru's pretty far to go a-looking for you, Ducie.”

“Not much looking required; I'll attend to all that.”

So these two chaffed one another, the best of friends evidently and not at all shy before a stranger like myself.

Ducie, in spite of his ingenuous air, was far from being the fool some people might have judged him. There was a shrewdness in many of the things he let off so easily; he had seen a fair share of the world, and, it was clear, rather enjoyed the seeming idiocy of some of his remarks, quite alive to their value and the humour of them. Beaumont was appreciative and gave him openings.

So we rattled on, and though I listened and even took a good hand in the conversation, my thoughts were many miles away, and I was none too sorry when it ended.

"Come to the opera with us to-night," said Beaumont, as we rose.

I thanked him and declined. I was going to Petersburg that very evening.

He looked astonished, and perhaps I was astonished too. But further inaction, waiting, waiting, waiting — anything rather than that ache and constant pain! I had suffered enough at Avignon and at Marseilles.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" said Ducie.

No, I couldn't stay here till it was time to call in for my registered letter. I looked at Ducie. "Nothing else to do," I answered; "this trip's on business —" Then I wondered why I had spoken.

"Got a passport?" said he.

I had not thought of that.

"You can't go without one, you know."

"Where can I get it?"

"At the Consulate. Beaumont and I'll go bail for you, unless you've got a birth, marriage, or death certificate about you."

I had nothing of that sort, but I had enough papers to

show that I really was a captain in his Majesty's service and no other than myself. Not that they asked for any such proof or documents, but still I thought it fair.

We drove to the Consulate, and a passport was an easy matter.

"Now we must go to the Russian Consulate and have the thing viséd," said Ducie; adding, "I'm in charge of this show, not Beaumont. You leave it to me."

I placed myself in his hands, without reserve.

"Got six francs in your pocket?" asked Ducie.

I had.

"Get 'em ready for the Russian; he hangs on to them; jolly easy way of earning your living, I call it. Beaumont and I have to work."

We were on the stroke of time. The consul had lighted a cigarette, preparatory to leaving.

"He won't go while there's any money about," said Ducie, unabashed.

The two secretaries knew him, and he was affability's self as we waited for his clerk to stamp and enter the official document.

"Rather a lark this," said Ducie, in the street. "I love to see anybody moving. We're tied by the leg, Beaumont and me. Now aren't we?"

"Both legs," said Beaumont; and they then shook hands with me, while I said thank you and promised to call in on them next time I was in their city.

They could have had but a bare idea what I was after. Presumably, Monsieur de Croisnel, or this mysterious De Jarnac of whom nobody had heard.

"Owes you money?" Ducie had suggested at our *déjeuner*, and I had not denied it, grateful, indeed, for a

suggestion that offered some plausible clew to my strange interest in the man.

Ducie had remarked that cards and horse-racing were the very deuce, and that bridge was far too intellectual, into the bargain.

"I can't remember what's in and what's out," he had said, "and my partners don't seem to like it. Horses are different."

A "bit on for the fun of the thing" was well enough, he had pursued, but plunging was "a mug's game" and he'd been bitten himself. The guv'nor drew the line at bookies; they were a luxury and not a necessity, the guv'nor said. "I don't care how many pair of trousers you order, Vivvy my son, but I'm hanged if I'm going to pay your gambling debts!" the guv'nor used to say. "And quite right too," added Mr. Vivian Ducie; while Beaumont said, "'Ear, 'ear!"

Strange it is how, going back to that long afternoon, the words and even the voices of these two youngsters return to me. They must be middling old by now, as I am, with some of the light-heartedness gone from them, perhaps with heiresses or diplomatic ladies of their own to keep them in check and subdue the levity wherewith they gazed upon a diplomatic universe. Unknown to me, or barely known to me, until that day, they gave me company the best part of an afternoon and did me no small service of its kind; maybe because they liked me and my stories of the war; perhaps because Beaumont and I were both from Charterhouse, had the same school,—Thackeray's old place, now moved beyond Guilford and set among the Surrey hills. Joan had visited me there; she and Roy and Darcy had descended on me more than once, Sir

Alison with them; she, a small kid with frocks that cleared her knee, attentive, worshipful, and tingling with the greatness of a day red-lettered. Now I worshipped. What lunches we had eaten in rooms full of parents come down to take their offspring from house-master's diet, and grow young themselves! Now all those boys were men, I with them, Roy too, and Darcy dead; and Joan,— poor Joan, — what had become of her?

CHAPTER X

I WAS in Berlin next evening, over the Russian frontier the day after, and on the following morning I arrived in Petersburg. Never before had I crossed Europe, seeing three capitals in just as many days. It was all new to me and very, very strange.

In Berlin I spent four hours, first dining, and then strolling about to look at the chief streets; but once out of Germany I was befogged. Language, even the air and feel of these new places, were different from anything that I had ever known. The grim brute with loaded rifle and fixed bayonet who greeted me at Wirballen, the frontier station, with the one word "passport," him I understood. But the rest was like a dream, or a theatre in which was played some strange, fantastic drama. Officials, everywhere officials, and porters with belts and blouses, loose trousers tucked in high boots, and small round caps above their willing faces. Instinctively I regarded them as thieves, despite their willingness, and kept a careful eye upon my kit-bags. I am not much inclined to boastfulness, but somehow, here, I felt like a man among dogs; a deaf-and-dumb man at that, for I could speak no word to anybody nor understand anything that was spoken. There were customs' officers who jabbered away at me, officials who walked about with passports, calling the owners' names, a money-changer who spoke German, and a ticket clerk who did the same. For about an hour I

waited in a restaurant, and how in all this muddle I found my train, I hardly know, nor will I ever know. The writing on the walls was new to me, the money, the very railway carriage in which I had engaged a berth.

For thirty hours I lived in that slow-moving train, which bellowed agonisingly where our trains whistle and was the most comfortable that I had ever known, with obliging servants and solemn ticket punchers prowling about its heated corridors; and outside, a vast, flat landscape, poverty-stricken and bleak, sandy waste or forest, of a monotony, an illimitable dulness that was reflected in the patient faces of the men and women I saw at stations or passed by hazard on the road. Several of my fellow-passengers spoke French, curious and simple they seemed, asking me point-blank about my business and making no secret of theirs. They were astonished that I should visit Russia for pleasure; one usually went elsewhere for that, they said, all except a gentleman from Moscow who declared his town unequalled in the world. At eight in the morning the train came to Petersburg.

I had been advised to go to the Hôtel de Londres, and thither I soon found myself careering in a ramshackle cab that made light of turnings and once or twice near spilled me in the road. The driver — *isvoschik* is the word indifferently applied to man or vehicle — went as though he were entered for a race, a cheerful ruffian in fur cap and caftan who, when I gave him a coin the size of a florin for the journey, bowed to me a dozen times and appeared to be more than contented. At the hotel I engaged a room, nay more, a suite, — anteroom, sitting room, and bedroom, and the cost was not so very great. It seemed to be the custom here. Except that a bath was something

of a ceremonial requiring notice, and my rooms not too well-aired or clean, I was really very comfortably installed.

But to find De Croisnel. The French Embassy, I learnt from the chief porter, was only a few minutes' drive. "Try him about four; you're sure to find him then," Beaumont had suggested. "Everybody in Petersburg is half asleep till after lunch, or else bad-tempered." And so I had my bath and breakfast, then walked about, found the Newski Prospect, — it was just outside, — discovered the Winter Palace, and finally landed up against an embankment facing water, with a low-lying fortress far off on the other side. This must be the Neva and the famous castle of Peter and Paul. And so it turned out to be. Before lunching I bought a Baedeker, identified these various objects, and even learnt the easier letters of that mysterious alphabet. АИТЕКА, seen on half a dozen shop fronts, I discovered to be nothing other than АПТЕКА or apothecary, the Greek Π being used in place of the Roman P. I lunched at the hotel, my Baedeker outspread, and I was hungry. I took a glass of vodka with my *hors d'œuvres*, as directed, and made an excellent meal off sturgeon and roast goose. Beaumont was right. Everybody around me looked as though they had just come from their bedrooms.

During the afternoon I again explored the quays facing the wide Neva, looking on at the throngs of people who drove or walked along this favourite promenade. Uniforms by the score were there, uniform caps on civilian clothes; the women were well if warmly dressed, for though the spring was come, a touch of frost still lingered in the air and ice-floes drove downstream upon the blue gray surface of the water. Every once in a while a coach-

man with the four-cornered hat in coloured velvet, which showed that he was driving a personage of rank and that the police must make uninterrupted way for him among the crowd of lesser vehicles, went gallantly past, in billowy caftan stuffed like a bolster, and seated high, majestic, above his horses. It was a splendid, halfway to barbaric, spectacle. A quiet closed brougham dashed by, drawn by two fiery Hungarian steppers. Perched on the step behind like some great bird was a bearded Circassian, daggers and pistols in his sash and rows of cartridge-cases crossing his sober uniform. This the police gave room for handsomely. It was the Tsar, driving from his Winter Palace on some imperial errand.

Down in the Newski, where I presently went strolling, it was the same. That immense boulevard was thick with traffic, the pavements thronged, the roadways; people, carriages uninterruptedly, as though the whole city were a school released and sent out-of-doors by the coming of spring.

A huge *suisse* received me at the French Embassy and handed my card on to another servant. In the paved hall I waited. I had known Croisnel slightly in London, a witty, sparkling fellow, well-bred and full of the vivacity of his nation. Women liked him; men liked him as well. He was good company and fearless out-of-doors, a keen horseman and something of a shot. He had the pallor of young men who keep late hours, but this went well with his dark eyes, dark complexion, and little insolent mustache.

He himself came down the broad staircase, in advance of the second flunkey, my card in his hand, agreeably astonished seemingly. "And what brings you to Peters-

burg — the last place in which I had expected you!" he said.

I told him it was on his account that I had come so far, and that I would like to see him privately in some place where we could talk undisturbed.

He looked surprised, but showed no hesitation.

Quite charmingly he answered me, and with his usual gayety. "Impossible here," he said, "in this city of spies, but we can at least try. Dine with me at my club — but I forget; I am engaged to dine with Lazáreff," he added. "Where are you staying?"

I gave him the name of my hotel.

"The Europe is better," said he; and then, "*Tiens*, it is four o'clock now. At five I will be free; as soon as I am off duty here, I will be with you."

On that we shook hands, and I walked back to the Great Morskaja and my hotel.

Croisnel was punctual. I met him in the hall, and together we went up to my little suite.

I gave him a chair, and he himself produced a case of cigarettes, the Russian kind, with paper mouthpieces. They are not so bad. A waiter brought us two glasses of tea at Croisnel's order.

"Very easy," said he, as I watched and listened. "*Dra* is two, *stakhan* is a glass, *chi* is tea — like your word China, for tea comes from there."

The waiter had left us and Croisnel was ready.

"Two winters ago," I began, "you were in Italy."

He nodded.

"At Pisa you met Sir Alison and Lady Garioch and Miss Garioch."

"Mutual acquaintance of ours, I believe," he said.

"Very dear friends of mine," I corrected him.

"Is that so?"

"You were one of a party," I continued, "which included a certain Count de Jarnac, a friend of yours."

"Only an acquaintance, if you will permit me."

"The Count de Jarnac and Miss Garioch are now married."

"I have heard of it."

"I do not know the Count de Jarnac, but Miss Garioch and I were almost brother and sister."

"But pray, if you will pardon me," said Monsieur de Croisnel, "in what way do I enter into this affair?"

"Was it not through you," I asked, "that the count first met Miss Garioch?"

"Certainly."

"Well," said I, with all the calm that I could muster, "it occurred to me, as an old friend of Miss Garioch, that perhaps you, who were the means of bringing this lady and her husband together, might have some knowledge of their whereabouts."

"And for this you came to Petersburg?"

"For nothing else," said I.

"The Count and Countess de Jarnac are making a secret of their place of residence?" he asked after a pause.

"I have been to Paris, to the address Monsieur de Jarnac gave there; and I have been to Avignon, to the Château de Jarnac which he described as his country-seat. Monsieur de Jarnac is not known at either place."

"And wherefore, may I ask, are you so interested in this delicate question?"

Why hide the truth from him? In all probability he knew it, and I was wasting time.

"I have been away in South Africa these last two years with my regiment," I said; "I left England as Miss Garioch's *fiancé*."

De Croisnel toyed for several moments with his cigarette.

"In that case," he said at last, "is not your affair with the young lady's parents? In my country, at least," and he shrugged expressive shoulders.

The argument was unanswerable, both as an argument and as opening avenues that led clear up to the honour of my Joan.

We paused, each sitting there thinking his own thoughts. It was, perhaps, a few moments that we sat thus, but the blankness of that interval seemed spread over a larger space. There was a knock at the anteroom door and the waiter came in, either to remove our glasses or else to inquire whether we wished them filled again.

"*Nyet!*" cried De Croisnel, impatient at this interruption; and the man backed out, leaving things as they were.

"*Nyet?*" The word was amazingly familiar. This—I had it—was what the hairy savage had repeated and repeated ten days ago when I had forced my way into the Château de Jarnac.

CHAPTER XI

THE entry of the waiter, followed as it was by De Croisnel's impatient exclamation, had for the moment sent me harking back to Avignon. The man attendant on the lunatic old gentleman, or whatever function he fulfilled in that strange house; my hairy friend, who had behaved so like a dog of a low breed, whom I had struck twice and who had lain so abjectly upon the floor — was a Russian!

"What does *nyet* mean?" I asked carelessly, as though hearing that curious monosyllable for the first time.

"*Nyet* means no," said De Croisnel, "and *da* is yes; but *nyet* may be almost any negative, for Russian is an elastic language, and the tone of the voice often means more than the words themselves. In this instance '*Nyet!*' meant 'Get out!' It was sufficient, was it not?"

"Quite," said I, while De Croisnel lit another cigarette.

"Your business with me is finished?" he asked, rising.

"Not entirely."

De Croisnel returned to his chair.

Before this significant digression, I had spoken to him of my affair much as one man of our world might in a similar situation address another, that is to say, calmly and without excessive heat. My position was that of a lover who has been unceremoniously put aside, a none too dignified position at its best, and I wished for some redress. More particularly, it was evident, I wished to obtain what satisfaction I could from the successful candidate, Joan's

husband, and the whilom acquaintance of Monsieur de Croisnel, who was indirectly responsible for my misfortune. He himself had admitted so much. A moment ago, however, politely but with a certain precision, he had declined to go farther with the matter. I must seek my remedy with "the young lady's parents," he had said.

"You suggested that I should demand an answer from Sir Alison and Lady Garioch," I now replied to him. "That, for certain reasons, is impossible. It is equally impossible that I should state these reasons. They exist, and you must take my word for them."

De Croisnel bowed. "Perfectly," was his interjection.

"Your attitude in this matter," I resumed, "is entirely the correct one. From a man of honour or, as we say, gentleman, I have no right to claim more. But you are a man as well; I also am a man; and between men, viewed entirely as men, perhaps correctness —"

He interrupted me at this point.

"As a man," he said, "you loved this young lady. That I quite understand; but — permit me to say so — your English custom is not without its defects. In France no man loves his *fiancée* till after he is married. This saves trouble. One is never disappointed — but pardon me, we are not discussing the customs of the two nations."

"Miss Garioch and I were engaged. Even in France an engagement is not a mere formality."

"On the contrary," said he, "it is often more binding than marriage. But what I wished to express was that our misfortunes can only begin after marriage and not before that devastating episode."

"We are hardly facing this question, Monsieur de Croisnel," said I. "You, even a Frenchman, if you wish to

raise a national issue, can figure to yourself a case in which two men love the same woman."

"None better than I!"

"Even in your country this might happen. There they would fight a duel. I wish to fight that duel, nothing more."

I had awakened his interest at last. He listened to me now with a more than courteous attention.

"You, I believe, can give me certain information," I pursued, "which will make this duel possible."

This time it was my turn to wait for him.

De Croisnel hesitated; and then, "You are mistaken," he replied; "I can give you no such information." He took two or three strides up and down the room. "I regret it, infinitely I regret it," he pursued; "the thing, however, is impossible."

He and I were standing face to face now, and from his expression, I could read that he had weighed the matter and reweighed it, and that his last words were absolute and final.

"I cannot help you," he resumed more suavely; "neither as man nor as man of the world can I go farther. I have not seen De Jarnac since the year you named. He was a chance acquaintance; I was presented to him at Monte Carlo, where one is presented to everybody, and subsequently we met in Italy as tourists and continued our voyage, sometimes separately, at other times together. I have no more extensive knowledge of him than that. I found him a very amusing companion on our Italian tour, and I have once or twice seen him in Paris, once or twice in London; but to his own house, either at Paris or near Avignon, I have never penetrated. Beyond this I can

add nothing to what you already know of him. I do not correspond with Monsieur de Jarnac; for a year I have lost sight of him. I regret it, the more so in that you have met with a misfortune which provokes my sympathy; and I, I assure you, am far from being a sentimentalist."

It was a long speech and spoken with some sincerity. Croisnel's profession, no less than his own personal disposition, were both of the kind that regards an unpleasant or a dangerous truth as matter to be carefully avoided. I made that mental reservation.

"You can give me no further help than this?" I now replied to him.

"Absolutely no more."

"On your word as a man of honour?"

"My word, in any form, is rarely questioned," said he.

I thanked him and made my apologies for presuming so largely upon our slight acquaintanceship.

He cut these excuses short.

"We will speak no more about that," he said; "but listen — I am addressing you as a friend, if you will permit me that honour — "

"Most gratefully."

"If you are wise, you will let this matter rest," he pursued. "It is over; in your place I would regard it as over."

"You give no reasons," I returned, somewhat ungraciously.

"I can tell you no more than this," he answered; and then: "Reasons, as you yourself observed just now, are sometimes of a nature that forces one to keep silent. It is impossible that they should be stated. Believe me,

such reasons exist. You asked me to take your word just now; this time I beg you will take mine."

What could I say to him?

"I can tell you nothing more definite," he insisted. "To follow up the pursuit on which you are engaged is hopeless. You have been injured and — I still keep to my point — your remedy, if you will have a remedy, is with the young lady's parents and not with her or with her husband. To go outside this, I say once more, is injudicious — and here I speak as a man of the world; but, speaking now as a friend, if you will again permit me the privilege, to go outside this, I repeat, is not only injudicious — it is dangerous!"

"I have known danger," I answered doggedly.

"You are a gallant gentleman," said he, "an officer in an army of tried gallantry — but this is not war."

"I am not afraid of men," I persisted.

"There are some men whom even the bravest of us must fear," said he, rising once more and giving me his hand. "If you stay here longer, you will always find me at the Embassy," he concluded. "To-night I dine with Lazáreff at the English Club, and perhaps, if you wish to see something of Petersburg, you will join us; or we go to Krestovsky's, a celebrated *café-concert*, afterwards, and perhaps you would like to meet us there. Any cabman will take you. And if you are staying in Petersburg and visit the Hermitage, do not fail to look for 'La Columbina'; it is worth while coming to Russia for the sake of that picture alone."

I went with him as far as the staircase head, and there we parted.

"If you will take my advice," he added, after I had

declined both invitations on the plea of resting after three nights in the train, "you will leave Russia and be philosophical. You will, particularly, leave Russia;" and with that he went his way.

Back in my room again, I pondered on his words, and especially on that word *nyet* which had revealed to me the nationality of the hairy savage who was in charge of the Château de Jarnac. Russia, dangerous for me according to De Croisnel, was the country in which I must seek for news of my beloved Joan. Why, I did not know; why, I could not even guess. De Jarnac was no Russian; or else Roy and Sir Alison, the whole Garioch family, had been deceived in him.

I was discussing these matters when a clerk of the hotel knocked at my door and asked for my passport. It would be entered and kept at the chief police bureau till I should require it again. I had to give but a few hours' notice before leaving Petersburg, and this all-important document would be returned to me. Such was the regulation in force, he explained, while I produced my pocket-book. I handed him the passport and continued my reflections.

Dè Croisnel knew something or, perhaps, everything. By no possibility, however, could I *force* him to speak. He had told me all he was going to tell me, and probably had no right to go any farther, just as I myself could go no step beyond the bare and incomplete statement that I had made to him. He meant well, so much was certain; but his advice, if followed, was just the very thing to destroy what little progress I had made. Or was it little? Who could tell? The boor at Avignon was a Russian and the servant of a Russian, some person, powerful and sinister, who had bought and paid for my dear Joan, endowing

her with a borrowed name, a barren title. At this very moment, in all likelihood, he was in Petersburg, maybe close to my hotel.

Such were my ultimate conclusions as I went down to dinner that evening; and afterwards, seeing I must do something, I bought a seat at the most fashionable theatre, taking the head porter's advice upon it. My ticket was a forlorn hope, a gambler's venture; such things *had* happened! For I thought that by some heroic chance, among a brilliant and representative audience, I might see faces — her face! Such things had happened, I told myself, driving down the Newski after I had dined.

His Imperial Majesty the Tsar Nicholas II was in a kind of drawing-room built into the centre of the grand tier, an enormous box with two sentries, rifles loaded, bayonets fixed, on duty outside. Her Imperial Majesty the Tsaritzza was with him, cold, suffering, like a frozen statue imprisoned underground. Her beauty hurt me. So might my Joan look if she too dwelt within this place. The Grand Dukes Alexis, Vladimir, and Kyril were pointed out to me by an officer with whom I exchanged a few sentences, we being neighbours.

Of the play itself I understood no single word save that recurring, ever present monosyllable "*Nyet!*" Of her for whom I sought, no trace, no vestige, and no sign.

CHAPTER XII

THUS had passed my first day in St. Petersburg. The second morning I rose late; was, indeed, almost a native for late rising. It was well towards ten o'clock before I kicked the blanket from my bed and rang the bell. A red-smocked servant brought me a hip-bath, the waiter followed with rolls and coffee, and as I dressed and breakfasted, I began to consider my next move in the strange and mystifying game whereon I was embarked.

Loiter about the streets all day, see and be seen; was there anything else that I could do? In all Russia I had no friends, no one to whom I could turn; I could not speak the language, nor read it, nor write it. To all intents I was deaf and dumb, blind as well, if groping in blindness to an indefinite end be taken as test. De Croisnel, my sole acquaintance in this capital, was useless; worse than useless, discouraging, even opposed to my main purpose, to my being here at all. I might look in at our Embassy and leave a card, but supposing some hospitality were shown to me, there would be questions. I must explain, give reasons for my visit, for coming, for remaining. What was I doing in Petersburg? Why had I no introductions? I would have asked as much myself. A secret, I discovered, is often more hostile than an open enemy.

That day was overlong. I wrote to Roy, giving him a brief account of what had happened since I quitted Avignon,

and once or twice I fell to wondering how it was with the registered letter that I had directed to the house near the Parc Monceau; whether they had taken it in there, or whether it had been returned to the address of the sender, at the Hôtel du Périgord, Rue de Grammont. Before lunching I did, indeed, follow De Croisnel's advice and pay a visit to the Hermitage, discovering even in that maze of splendid galleries the Milanese "Columbina" — beautiful picture of a beautiful woman — to which he had so warmly directed my attention. It really is a masterpiece, subtle, tender, exquisite — indoors or out, however, my real interest was not for objects inanimate or rare, but with the people, the living flesh and blood of these long hours. Walking or driving, moving across the waxed parquet of endless galleries, it was with them that I searched vainly for reward. Once or twice I fancied that here was somebody who might be my dear Joan, but overtaking such ladies or passing them in face, the resemblance was so superficial or non-existent that, had she really come toward me in the end, I would have hesitated until the last decisive moment. And so that morning went its way, and the best part of the afternoon.

I had lunched at the Bear, wandered on the Neva quays, strolled on the two Morskaias, and down the Newski as far as the Moscow station. I was rather tired of it all. These excursions might have been followed by an evening equally futile, had I not stayed indoors for the hour preceding dinner, and, my Baedeker assisting, attempted a copy of the Russian alphabet, provided, as are most other things, by that invaluable guide.

I was drawing the letter "zhe," which looks like two K's stuck back to back, tied fast and made prisoner, when

an officer of police, in gray military surtout and round astrakhan cap, was shown in by the waiter.

This officer, apparently, knew all about me; for, "The gentleman is English, but speaks German," he began, himself using that language, in which he had a certain guttural facility.

I spoke German.

He had called in person for my passport.

"A second one?"

"There is only one."

Naturally my answer was that he must address himself to the clerk of the hotel who had come up here the evening before, asked for the document in question, and gone off with it, at the same time assuring me that such was the custom, and that all passports so collected were handed over to the police bureau in accordance with the regulation.

The officer heard me out very politely, even helped himself to a chair and lit a cigarette.

"I have just come from the police bureau," was his reply, "and we know nothing of any passport."

"Then hadn't you better go downstairs and see the clerk?"

"Why not?" said he; "the waiter can go and fetch him."

The clerk was sent for. Yesterday he had been a respectful, modest person, such as are most clerks with stereotyped duties to fulfil, and I had barely noticed him. To-day he reappeared, a spiritless, unwholesome-looking creature in a brown suit, who was evidently most abjectly afraid. Of course he would know nothing of my passport, or of anything else for that matter. He was obviously a mere mouthpiece, and, if such were his instructions, ready to perjure himself and swear black white.

"You have to take my word against his," I said.

It was clearly a trap, a conspiracy; so much was certain; and set going by De Croisnel; for no one else in all Petersburg had known that I was here. What would happen next, I wondered?

The police officer answered me.

"Without a passport you cannot stay in Russia," he said.

"Well, I certainly had one at Wirballen, or else they wouldn't have let me in," was my retort.

"Many people come in without them."

"I have nothing to do with that," said I.

"Unless you can show a passport, you will be escorted to the frontier and put across into Germany," he answered, rising.

I kept my seat, at the table with the open Baedeker and the note-book wherein I had a moment ago put down the letter "zhe."

De Jarnac, or he whom I called De Jarnac, was behind all this. For De Croisnel such measures would not have been taken; plainly enough some other party than he was interested in my leaving Russia; some one, moreover, possessed of the power and means to secure and to enforce my prompt eviction. De Croisnel might have been to blame in the first instance, but who other than De Jarnac could be the real principal in this conspiracy?

It was no use arguing.

"This is a plot, an arrangement between you and our friend here," I said, pointing to the abject clerk. "I am helpless; you will, however, give me the opportunity of appealing to my Embassy?"

The officer pulled out his watch.

"It is now eighteen minutes after six," he returned;

"you will be free till half-past nine, You will be kept under observation, but you can go and come as you please. At ten o'clock a train leaves the Warsaw station for the frontier. You will be escorted to that train. You will either go quietly or offer resistance; that again is exactly as you please. I myself will be ready for you here at nine-thirty. There will be a carriage and two men waiting for us. They will be armed. Without a passport one is not allowed to remain in Russia;" and with that he made me a ceremonious bow and took his leave.

There was very little time to lose if I would ask assistance at our Embassy. The telegraph could easily be worked. A wire to Paris would prove conclusively that both Beaumont and Vivian Ducie had seen me correctly provided with the document whose non-possession had been so abominably contrived, so adroitly seized upon, by my adversary. They had actually been with me, had even affirmed my identity at the two Consulates. Once get them on the wires and this so cunning plot would be frustrated.

Luckily the Embassy is only a short ten minutes' drive from the Hôtel de Londres. I already knew its squat exterior, had already noted this roomy, red-brick palace facing the Neva and the Troitzsky Bridge. The head porter found me an *isvoschik* and directed him. As I started off, a second cab drew away from the farther curb and followed discreetly behind my own. Except for this sinister and half-expected proceeding, I reached the Embassy without mishap.

It was after official hours, but in such an emergency one might be pardoned a liberty, or even, for that matter, a whole Declaration of Independence. I paid my driver and dismissed him. The other cab had stopped as well, again

waiting in readiness beside the opposite pavement. There were two men in it, the two armed men, no doubt, with whom the police officer had threatened me at the hotel; shabby, sullen, miserable, they were, of that class — one knows it — which does the dirty work of most great despotisms.

The *suisse* who answered my ringing was, fortunately, a linguist. I gave him my card and a three-rouble note. He bowed, almost to the earth.

The ambassador was out, he said, so were the first and second secretaries. Lord Hanley, one of the junior secretaries, was still in the chancellery, and with him was Colonel Dampier, the military attaché.

I did not wait for more — a soldier was good enough for me!

"Send my card up to Colonel Dampier at once," said I, "and tell him that my business is important."

But there was no need for the *suisse* to go farther, for hardly had I finished, when Colonel Dampier himself came down the wide staircase, followed by young Hanley, a nervous little chap with what is known as "the Oxford manner," and little else.

Beaumont and Vivian Ducie in Paris had spoken disrespectfully enough of some of their colleagues; I am about to speak more disrespectfully still.

I was a captain in his Britannic Majesty's army; my regiment, "the Buffs," is not the least famous in that gallant force; my own name too has honourable associations. I mention these things, not in any spirit of vain-glory, but as throwing some light on the two young gentlemen who were, officially, my friends, protectors, and representatives in this emergency.

Heaven help the British tax-payer if this be the sort of thing our Foreign Office sends out! Beaumont and Ducie in Paris were good fellows and manly fellows, a credit to any country in the world; but now I was in a different case, and this was the last place, the last moment, in which I could afford to intrust my freedom and my personal safety to fools.

Lord Hanley, the third secretary, and Colonel the Honourable George Dampier, our military attaché, came down the Embassy staircase, the day's work done, and apparently on their way to a good dinner.

Hanley I have described, harmless, industrious perhaps, but chiefly the son of his father or the pride of an influential mamma. Dampier's coloneley was obviously an honorary rank lent to him during his tenancy of an official billet; for he was a little whippersnapper of a chap with, perhaps, ten or twelve years' service to his record. I had read a great deal in the newspapers of our officers, contemptuous, ungrateful stuff about "side," incompetence, ignorance, and bumptiousness in general. Till that evening I had regarded all such writings as twaddle.

Dampier had my card; Hanley, a nervous, timid little chap, took cover behind him.

"Excuse my worrying you," I said, "but something's gone wrong with my passport. I gave it to a clerk at the hotel who said it was his business to hand it over to the police. That was yesterday. To-day a police officer has come up to my room, and he and the clerk both swear that they've never seen any passport. At ten to-night they threaten to shove me in a train and put me across the frontier."

Dampier wasn't interested. Hanley had grown more nervous than ever.

"We don't know you," said Dampier. "If you want to see the ambassador, you'd better come here in the morning."

"But they're hauling me off to-night," I said.

"We don't know you," Dampier repeated; and then with a "Come along, Hanley," went past me and out into the street.

CHAPTER XIII

I HAD followed them, Lord Hanley, the junior secretary, and Colonel Dampier, our military attaché. At such a moment pride must wait its turn.

Though I felt more like kicking Dampier than speaking to him, "Vivian Ducie and Beaumont in Paris are friends of mine," I said; "you don't know me, but perhaps you know them. They were with me when I had my passport viséd at the Russian Consulate. Will you wire to them and ask? They'd answer like a shot."

Hanley, who by himself might have been reasonable or at least have taken orders, was growing more embarrassed than ever.

Dampier called out "*isvoschik*" to a passing cab.

If he could not get rid of me a-foot, it seemed, he would attempt to escape on wheels.

"Step in, Hanley," he said; and to me, "You're after office hours, and it's no good worrying us."

He gave a direction, and the cab was off.

On the other side of the road still waited the two police spies and *their* vehicle.

I returned to my friend the *suisse*.

"At what hour will his Excellency be in this evening?" I asked.

The *suisse* could not say. Ambassadors, it appeared, do not leave such information with their hall porters.

Well, I would wait.

The *suisse* made no objection. Gentlemen who tip so lavishly must be accommodated.

I spent a dreary hour upon one of the wooden benches in that vestibule. It was deadly dull, but here, at least, I was safe. The Embassy was British soil, and therefore beyond the reach of all the police in Russia. It could not be invaded without an international argument. Whatever might happen later on, at the moment I had the laugh of my pursuers. Every now and then I looked out into the darkening street. A cab still waited against the opposite curb, and the two men, leaving the driver upon his box, were leaning casually against the stone embankment. They were quite human now, chatting away there and smoking cigarettes. Beyond them flowed the Neva, and far away the long low line of the prison fortress of Peter and Paul. The *suisse* opened a newspaper and produced a pair of spectacles. Somehow with these upon his nose he too looked human, quite unflunkified; a different *suisse*, engaged in study and a man of parts. On his high stool he sat, and presently turned up the lights.

On the Troitzsky Bridge the lamps were lit, as well. Carriages drove past, cabs; the cabman on the other side of the road had lit up, too. It was dark outside now, and I hungry as the wolf. No ambassador appeared, not even so much as a secretary or attaché. Heaven alone knows what I thought during those two hours, till at last all the vague ideas of such a vigil became focussed and were only one idea, a clear white certainty that hit me clean between the eyes. In all my selfishness I had forgotten Joan. If they were treating me like this, what would they do to *her*?

Would she not have to suffer for my persistency, I asked myself? Her husband knew that I was here. Against me, hardly in his power, he had taken summary measures and extreme. Against her, wholly in his power, what could he not do? In that instant I saw myself making her martyrdom even more cruel, the place of her concealment even more secret and hidden from the world. Joan would suffer. I must go.

Once this possibility had come to me there was no hesitation. I looked at my watch. It was close on nine. I must eat something and then surrender to the jackal police officer.

I thanked the friendly *suisse*, so much more able a diplomat than his two colleagues. Perhaps I would call again in the morning.

He bowed me out, and once in the street, I crossed over to the waiting cab, entered it, and ordered the driver to the Hôtel de Londres. The two men gasped at me, but took their place, — the one in face, the other at my side. I felt the butt of my neighbour's pistol pressing against me as we drove. "Revolver?" I asked, and he said, "*Da.*" So I arrived back at my starting-point.

I had packed and was in the middle of a hasty meal when the police officer reappeared in mufti, entering the dining room and taking a chair at the same table.

Arms akimbo and smiling across at me, he watched me eat. I offered him a glass of wine, and he accepted.

"And what did they say to you at your Embassy?" he asked.

"Said that they didn't know me and that it was after office hours," I answered grimly and with a smile.

"*Tchinovniki!*" was his contemptuous comment. "Off-

cials! What can one expect? They are the same everywhere."

Once past the unpleasant half of his duties, this police officer was quite good company, even warm-hearted and generously disposed.

"I am glad you gave no trouble," he confessed; "I have to get my living and obey."

"Whom?" I asked.

"My superiors," he laughed, "and these we will not specify."

I paid my bill and we drove to the Warsaw station, the second cab close behind us.

On the way I had to make the following choice: would I prefer a goods wagon and two armed men, or would I go first-class with him and give my word of honour not to behave differently from any other first-class passenger?

Naturally I chose the latter course.

Popoff was his name, and he kept me company for close on twenty hours, all the way from Petersburg to the frontier. We became quite good friends at last, I giving him as a souvenir a silver cigar cutter I had on my watch chain, and he responding with a handful of picture post-cards which he bought at the buffet at Vilna and a small bottle of Caucasian cognac obtained from the same source. This, however, we emptied on the way, while he insisted on my smoking nothing but his cigars, specially purchased so that he might ply his recent acquisition. In many ways he was an overgrown schoolboy and most likeable.

At Wirballen we parted with mutual regrets, he seeing me safely through the ceremonial of leaving Russian soil; *having, indeed, friends here, a testimony to former activity*

in his rôle of "chuckerout." As my train moved off, making for Germany and freedom, he handed me a sealed envelope. I broke it; and here was my original passport, intact and stamped and dated, the very one that Vivian Ducie and Beaumont had procured for me in Paris.

I had taken a return-ticket, dreaming that all my business in St. Petersburg consisted of a satisfactory interview with De Croisnel and a return to the house with the iron railings near the Parc Monceau. On the journey I thought again of my registered letter, and wondered what that was doing; and also how it fared with Louis Prévost, the artist who was so shy of blondes, with the cunning peasant who officiated as concierge, and with the robust German, Dr. Nachtigal. I unfolded the receipt I had taken in the Paris post-office. It still lay safe and sound within a pocket of my letter-case.

The journey from Wirballen to Berlin is dull, and glad enough was I to sleep through much of it. There was another four hours' wait in Berlin, this time in early morning, and bright and clean the city looked in the new sunshine; for it was May-time and the spring, the fairest month of the whole calendar. Again I wandered forth, and saw the Thiergarten, Unter den Linden, and the Gate of Brandenburg, till it was time to board my train for Paris and be gone.

Light-heartedly enough I seem to write what I have here set down; but can one always be a-weeping? And I, by nature cheerful, sanguine, unreserved, have not quite shaken off these earlier habits and their friendliness. A "merry devil" Joan once called me, quoting some old play whose hero bore that title like a lord. "Merry Devil of Edmonton" he was, if I recall aright. Though in some

hours my heart seems near to breaking, yet will my merri-ness persist in spite of me. I think one sometimes laughs the loudest when the pain is deepest. A smart blow meaning little, and one cries out; but when the inmost core is pierced and bleeding silently, then one must laugh or die. Cries will not avail, nor any other tearful roaring. Nature wills it that way, being paradoxical; sprinkling comedy amid her tragedies, lawyers about equity, and showers amid the splendid sunshine of the opening year. Too much perfection would spoil us, she seems to say. No doubt but that we run small risk of spoiling if we really live, instead of lying soft amid our money-bags. That way slow death, decay, decrepitude — but I am on the road to Paris and not a prophet or gray moralist.

The next morning I arrived, ready for home and Roy and the rest of them, with little to show for all my wanderings, except that Joan was in Russia, and if I attempt that country again, it must be with a new passport, and perhaps with a new name, and certainly with an avoidance of Monsieur de Croisnel.

The wide spaces of this splendid city, its fine clear light, affected me, as they always affect the stranger, that May morning. London is a slum compared with Paris. Wonderful people that could so accommodate their needs to fit this scheme! We are opportunists; these are statesmen, building for posterity as well as for to-day. St. Petersburg, spacious though it be in the centre, was squalid and unimpressive beside this place; and then it has no sun. It is a ghost of a city, expressing nothing, except a ghostly Tsar. Even the Rue de Grammont, narrow and awkward though it be, was full of that white light. I thought of Louis *Prévost, the Master*, with his "*La lumière!*" The old

boy was right. *Lumière* is the breath of life to us. At the Hôtel du Perigord I stepped out and handled francs again. Of the capable young person in charge I demanded letters. There was one from Roy, one from my mother; but the registered letter which I had despatched to the house with the iron railings near the Parc Monceau was not come back.

CHAPTER XIV

I HAD made myself presentable after three nights in the train when I set out for the second time to make inquiry here in Paris. To-day I would begin with the concierge. This new battery and alarm was, perhaps, rather a hopeless business, for after what I had undergone in Petersburg, a search in Western Europe seemed absurd, necessarily fruitless, and lacking point; but still there was my registered letter to be accounted for; that, at least, was a certainty.

The concierge was at his post, and whether he was pleased to see me or the reverse, no man could say. With his toothless gums he mumbled out a "*Bon jour, Monsieur,*" and "*Bon jour,*" I answered him. His small cunning eyes betrayed no misgiving; he was slow and deliberate as ever in his speech; only his right hand trembled a little as I stood there questioning him, and this might be from some natural cause which I had left unnoticed on my first visit; an everyday infirmity, perhaps, or a complaint that came and went.

He waited stupidly for me to state my business.

"Dr. Nachtigal is at home?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," said he.

"And Monsieur Prévost?"

"Also."

"Since I called last no letter has come for the Count de Jarnac?"

"Absolutely nothing. If a letter came, it would be returned to the postman," he added slowly; "that is the rule."

I left him and rang at Dr. Nachtigal's.

"Back again," said he; "and what can I do for you this time?"

Without more ado, I told him the reason of my visit and showed him my receipt.

"Eight days," said he; "unless your letter was taken in here, you should have had it back before now. I have seen nothing of it; but have you inquired at the post-office to see who signed for it?"

I told him I had not, but that I might do so after I had seen Monsieur Prévost upstairs. "For this," I added, "is the third registered letter which has been addressed to the Count de Jarnac at this house, and of the three, no single one has been returned, although each, to my knowledge, was furnished with the sender's name and full address."

The doctor pondered.

"It is a regular mystery," he said at last; and then suddenly, "Go to Monsieur Prévost, and if you are wise, you will also see his servant. For the Master is a child — a common type — in my practice I meet many of them. If they had not genius, they would be locked up and cared for by the State."

I promised to see the Master's servant. "And your own?" I asked.

"We can settle that instantly," said he.

The doctor rang a bell, and soon we had all three ranged sheepishly before us, man, parlour maid, and cook.

"Have any of you seen a registered letter that was addressed here to a certain Count de Jarnac?" he began.

They were all very much astonished at the question; the cook was even indignant. No, each answered separately, the cook with gesticulations, the others without.

"Have any of you taken in a registered letter at all these last eight days?"

None of them had.

"My lunch will be ruined," said the doctor, as they filed out again; "the cook — did you observe the cook?"

He took my troubles genially; even his own, if a spoiled meal count as such.

I thanked the doctor warmly. "You will think me a 'common type' as well," I said in leaving, and then climbed up the staircase to my friend the Master.

The same buxom maid-servant as before opened to me.

"Ah, it is the Englishman!" she cried. "The Master is in his studio; he has a headache and will not work. He has sent his model away, and it is a lost morning; but perhaps you can cure him," she rattled on. "If he offers you a picture to-day, laugh at his prices; when he has a headache, they are ridiculous; but when he is well, they are more ridiculous than ever. And people pay them; that is the most ridiculous of all! When the Master has a headache, he says, 'Jules Prévost, thou art an idiot, and thy pictures are worth nothing.' Like that," and she copied him. "If I did not stop him, he would present them to all the rogues in Paris. But monsieur understands."

"I've not come to buy pictures," it was the first opportunity she had given me.

"No, monsieur is sensible," said she.

At this and her many unexpected confidences I could not repress a smile or, perhaps, a laugh.

"Well, let us go up to the studio;" and she led the way.



“‘AH, IT IS THE ENGLISHMAN!’ SHE CRIED.”

"Master, it is the Englishman of last week," she announced, entering that spacious and lofty place of light, where Jules Prévost, very disconsolate, sat looking at an unfinished canvas which "would not march."

He received me as though I had been his dearest friend.

"And thou," he cried to the unfinished canvas, "to-morrow thou wilt march! If not to-morrow — then never!" he threatened it. "Mathilde, a chair for monsieur!"

I expressed my sorrow at finding him so troubled.

"Pah," he cried, "it is tobacco! I smoke too much. Above all, the cigarettes! They are a poison. They are an invention of the devil! From this instant I have done with them! From to-day I will never smoke another! I swear it! Never again! But perhaps you, Monsieur, are different," and he handed me a case of his poison, of these same villanous cigarettes which, a moment ago, he had so eloquently denounced.

I accepted one and struck a light.

"After you, sir," said he; and following my example, "A last one, absolutely the last one, Mathilde," he added, blowing the smoke out of his nostrils like some heraldic beast. "Ha, this feels good!" he sighed.

Mathilde shook her head over him. She was about to leave us, when I, mindful of what Dr. Nachtigal had told me in the flat below, begged her to stay.

"But I am busy, Monsieur," she protested.

I brought out my receipt and handed it to the Master. Mathilde's turn came next.

"Here," I explained, "is a receipt for a registered letter posted to my friend the Count de Jarnac at this address; yet everybody, — the concierge, Dr. Nachtigal, and you,

Monsieur Prévost,—everybody tells me that a Count de Jarnac is unknown to any one of you, and still the letter was accepted and kept by some one in this house."

The Master's expression when I had done was that of a man who is intensely disappointed, but who is far too amicable and good-hearted to say anything aloud. He tried hard to conceal his feelings, but, "*Mon Dieu*, what an extraordinary fuss to make about so little!" was written all over his kindly face. He had expected a murder at the very least, so it appeared.

It was Mathilde, the buxom maid-servant, who interrupted us.

"The Count de Jarnac is the gentleman who took the Master's apartment for a year. He gave it up last winter, for then he married. It was time he married, that count!"

The Master stared at both of us.

"And here am I," he exclaimed, "who have misled monsieur! I am alone with Mathilde," he pursued; "there is no better lighted studio than this in Paris; but if one has the studio, one is forced to take the apartment. No apartment, no studio. Monsieur follows me?"

I nodded.

"I do not want the apartment," he resumed, "for there are three good rooms up here, plenty of space, more than one requires. Still, as I must have the studio, I am forced to take the apartment. Monsieur understands?"

Again I nodded.

"When I can let the apartment at a good price, I do so and live up here in the three rooms that adjoin the studio; or, rather, it is Mathilde who lets the apartment and I am not bothered, I am let alone. I do not wish to know anything about it. Mathilde says the apart-

ment is let; I say, 'All the better,' and reside up here. Mathilde attends to all business, I attend to my art. Mathilde, my headache is quite gone," he ended, "and for this I have to thank monsieur."

He had finished. Disconcertingly simple was this explanation, and absolutely in keeping with his peculiar character.

"How long is it since you have seen Monsieur de Jarnac?" I asked.

"He was here yesterday with madame the countess and another lady," replied Mathilde.

Now it was my turn to stare.

"Those two ladies, a blonde and a brunette, who were here yesterday!" exclaimed the Master; "and whom I said the good day to in the *salon*?"

"The count had left several things here with me," continued Mathilde, "and he had come to remove them."

"But why did you not tell me of all this?" cried the Master.

"So that you should say, 'I will not be bothered with that confounded apartment! Away with your apartment!' I know you!" exclaimed Mathilde, no less vehemently.

"She is right," said Louis Prévost, this time addressing himself to me. "And now I remember; I saw these two ladies with my own eyes, and the blonde, like all the blondes, was a *poupée*, a doll — like all the blondes!" he repeated, "like all the blondes! She had no taste; she was indifferent; she had no manners; when I offered to show these two ladies the masterpieces of my collection, of my studio, the blonde, speaking for both, refused my hospitality! Beware of blondes," he cried with rising

anger; "they waste one's time, the glorious years that one should give to work —"

"But this one, my dear Master, declined to waste even a single moment!" I interrupted.

"That doesn't matter," he returned, "she would have done; a little encouragement, and my day would have been lost!"

"And the brunette?" said I, again coming between him and this rabid subject of the blondes.

"Ah, the brunette," he returned, "she was a queen!"

Like every good artist, Louis Prévost had an eye that saw in general and that saw in detail. Now he was as enthusiastic as previously he had been violent and denunciatory.

"She was a queen," he repeated ardently, "a goddess! I did not exchange a word with her," he said, "the malevolent blonde prevented that; but nevertheless we understood one another." And then he went on to describe her more particularly.

I let him talk — I, eager and listening hungrily to his description; for it was my Joan, her unmistakably, the eye of her, the colour of her, the height of her, the carriage, the noble head that sat so firmly on the slender throat. I did not interrupt him now.

CHAPTER XV

"MONSIEUR is in love with madame la comtesse." It was plain Mathilde who made this statement; thereby proving anew that for wireless or Marconigraphic intuitions women are the very deuce.

Perhaps I coloured. Certainly I did not answer; all of which made Mathilde not sure, but doubly sure.

"*Eh bien*, you have my felicitations," said Louis Prévost; "she was a great lady; that one could see with a single eye."

So Joan was in Paris, had been here yesterday, in this very house!

"Have you their address?" I asked.

"No, I have nothing," replied Mathilde; "the count attended to his business and left."

Where to find them!

"Did they look as though they were living here, or like travellers?" I asked.

"They were well dressed, but they came and went in a hired fiacre, the count and the two ladies."

"The count speaks French exactly like a Frenchman?"

"But he is a Parisian, is he not, Monsieur?"

I, who was supposed to know him, could only answer, "Of course."

Mathilde had not spoken with the two ladies.

The Master all this while was growing impatient; for a conversation in which he could not take the lead, thereby

occupying the centre of the stage, so to speak, was little to the taste of one so volatile.

"And the letter, the registered letter!" he now cried, suddenly grown interested in the tracing of that vanished missive.

"Yes," I joined with him; "did the Count de Jarnac get that?"

"I know nothing of any registered letter," replied Mathilde; "there was a plain one, addressed to madame la comtesse that had lain here since the winter. This I gave to him. He came here for a walking-stick which he had forgotten, very curious and valuable, for a fur overcoat, and for a small black box that he had left with me and that he now required."

"I have it!" Louis Prévost it was who had startled us. "I have it!" and he flung off his working blouse and struggled into a velvet jacket, whose colour, green as grass, shed an effulgent if bilious lustre on the three of us. What a green lustrous coat it was! Emerald, Hibernian, green as midsummer lawns in an old English garden. He buttoned it and smoothed it and said, "Now!"

The Master was ready.

"The concierge must be interrogated," he cried. "Leave this to me!" With a dramatic hand he silenced us. "I am not often roused," he roared, "but when I am roused — Paris hears of it! When I am roused, I am formidable — *formidable!*" he repeated, showing an excellent set of teeth and tugging at his pointed beard. "Mathilde, we will have the concierge up here. Go fetch him; it is my order!"

Mathilde obeyed, for she too had become interested in this mystification; and perhaps its romantic aspects,

so accurately plumbed and stated just before, made their appeal.

My feeble protest — “but I have already spoken to the concierge” — met with no attention from the roused and duly formidable Master.

“Pah, he smokes a pipe!” was his reply.

Mathilde returned, and with her the captive house-servant.

“Let us be seated,” cried Louis Prévost.

We sat down where we could, — I on my chair, the Master on the model’s “throne,” Mathilde on a pile of cushions. Only the concierge remained standing.

It was admirably stage-managed — half a circle, with the prisoner facing us.

Through all these preliminaries the concierge stood there, unmoved, impassive, barely interested, cunning-stupid as ever, and still with that slight trembling in one hand — the right.

The Master begged me to give him my receipt.

“There are two others,” I added; “they, however, are in England.”

“So three registered letters in all?” inquired the Master.

I nodded.

“Of which here is the receipt for the last, handed in at the post-office in the Rue de Rivoli, here in Paris, just eight days ago. Concierge, what have you to say to this? The Count de Jarnac was my tenant, he was my guest, you have betrayed him. It is I who am responsible for his correspondence. Concierge, you have made this house unsafe!”

It is difficult to translate into so sober a tongue as English the precise wording and effect of Louis Prévost’s

denunciation and arraignment of that unfortunate concierge. The Master took everything for granted, — the other's guilt, contumacy, double dealing, and fraud. The prisoner might have had something "to say to this"; but till the Master was done, and exhausted, and out of breath, words, and respiration generally, not a chance did he get of counterspeech; no gap where he could slip in a defence, or even make the fraction of such protest. It was like Fouquier-Tinville with his guillotine.

Our language, as I said before, fails me, and will do no justice to the Master's eloquence. What in English would have been melodramatic and exaggerated was in French merely dramatic and rhetorical. Mathilde was visibly impressed; and as for the concierge, it certainly produced its effect with him. Where an Englishman, even an English servant, might have exclaimed irreverently, taking the whole thing as transpontine and absurd, the concierge trembled, not only in his right hand, but, to use a common expression, in his very boots.

The Master was quick to seize upon this vibrant evidence of conscious guilt. "Thou tremblest, criminal!" he cried.

"What does the Master desire?" the concierge mumbled with his toothless gums — it was his first recognisable opportunity. "If the Master will ask me questions, I will answer him."

The Master at the moment desired breath more than anything.

The Master recovered and lit a cigarette. We both lit cigarettes. There was an interval, during which Mathilde produced a bottle of wine.

"Drink, scoundrel!" cried the Master, refilling a tumbler and handing it to the vacuous prisoner.

The concierge drank.

The Master was himself again.

"You are accused," he resumed, "of suppressing three registered letters addressed to the Count de Jarnac in this house where he was my tenant and my guest. Answer that!"

"It is six months since the Count de Jarnac occupied your apartment; on the first of June it will be six months," prevaricated the concierge.

"Rogue," responded the Master, "the Count de Jarnac was here yesterday!"

The concierge trembled all over now, and violently.

"And look," continued the Master, flourishing the receipt; "here we have the official proof of your guilt! A document," he cried, "a document!"

The other, ignorant, half-educated, ill-informed, with only a peasant's cunning and stupidity to pit against all this advocacy and zeal, now broke down utterly.

Mathilde too was watching him.

"It is really he and no other," she said. It was a dry remark and dryly spoken.

The concierge had dropped to his knees. He would make confession, full confession, he chattered, his gums working vigorously, and with the loose flesh straining on his skinny throat. If the Master would promise not to prosecute, not to have him chased from the house, he would tell all. He would tell everything. He had stolen nothing, he had gained nothing, only miseries. It was he himself that had been the victim. If the Master would promise —

"It is this gentleman who will have you prosecuted and will have you chased," interrupted the Master, indicating me.

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"Will he not have mercy?" begged the concierge.

I cut him short.

"Go on," said I. What did it matter now? I knew everything three registered letters would prove or could have proved.

"Monsieur will not take action?"

"I am quite indifferent."

"Monsieur promises to let this matter rest with my confession?"

I promised.

"Your word of honour, Monsieur?" The concierge was brightening.

I gave my word of honour.

The concierge began his tale.

"Monsieur the Count de Jarnac left here for good and always last November. He was coming here no more, he said. For I asked him," insisted the concierge; "I asked him twice. With me he left no address, nor with Mathilde either. I asked her; I asked her also twice. First one letter came for him, and I gave it to Mathilde. Then came registered letters, first two and now one. The Count de Jarnac had left no address; he was gone for good. In a registered letter is usually money. The postman and I understand one another. According to the rule, a registered letter must be placed in the hands of the addressee, who then signs for it. . . . 'There is no Count de Jarnac here; he is gone and will come back no more, *hein?* Will you be the Count de Jarnac?' said the postman. 'We will divide what is in the letter.' . . . I agreed. The first time it was I who signed; the second time it was the postman; and last week it was I who signed again. And for our pains we had nothing, only three letters written

in English, which we do not understand. Here they are;" and the concierge, unbuttoning his coat, produced from an inner pocket the two letters that had come from England and the one that I had sent in Paris. "In all three," he ended, "there was not so much as a single sou!"

"That is why you have not burnt them?" It was the Master who put this strangely subtle question.

"Perhaps," came slowly from the prisoner.

The Master had nodded his head sagely while this recital was in progress, and now, at its finish, "What did I say?" he cried. "It is the intuition of genius. Detectives, women, all have their intuitions; but genius — genius cannot be deceived!"

I cheerfully agreed with him; for, argue how one may, he, with his divinations and perceptions, had arrived at once and unfalteringly where all my logic might, perhaps, with difficulty have penetrated.

"Yes, it is very true." Mathilde was congratulating her employer. "In everyday affairs the Master is a child," she continued, "and anybody can deceive him; but in exceptional affairs he is as wise as Solomon."

"Now I will take off my velvet coat," said the Master. "Mathilde, go find my blouse."

The concierge waited humbly and in trepidation.

"As for thee," said the Master, "thou hast suffered."

The concierge had suffered terribly. At night he could not sleep. "And see, my hand shakes," he exclaimed; "during six months I have suffered, and in the end I have gained nothing except disgrace!"

"*Eh bien*, thou wilt steal no more registered letters," replied the Master. "Thank this gentleman for his leniency

and be gone. Thou hast been punished; it is over; get out!"

And so that episode ended.

On my way out I left a message for Dr. Nachtigal telling him that all was explained; and then for the last time in my life I looked back on the house with the iron railings near the Parc Monceau. I have not seen it since, nor have I seen the Master, nor Mathilde, nor the hypocritical concierge who mumbles with his toothless gums. All these are vanished like a curious and exciting dream.

Returning to the Hôtel du Périgord, I found a telegram awaiting me. It was from Roy. "Come back at once," it said; "will explain here. No matter how successful, do not hesitate."

CHAPTER XVI

I DID not hesitate; still, there was no train till the evening, and I had ample time to ponder on the strange entanglement wherein I was immeshed.

Driven out of Russia, with De Jarnac and Joan in Paris; here in Paris within so little space of them, perhaps; and yet no farther than when I had started from England three weeks back! That was my predicament. For where, between here and Petersburg, could one find them? where encounter anybody who knew their place of residence? Did they live here or in Russia or elsewhere? It was impossible to say. But why had I been turned out of Russia if not by the count's orders? Croisnel most certainly could not have procured my expulsion. And then there was the Russian savage in charge of the Château de Jarnac to be explained. Joan and the count, however, had been in Paris yesterday; in all likelihood were still here; or — I was arguing in a circle, this whole business was a circle; whatever way I turned I reached my starting-point; like some caged animal chasing and chasing and forever chasing round the same walls of its circular cage. But perhaps Roy's message held the key to all these riddles. I would take the evening train and see him early next day. So ran my answering wire, with "quite unsuccessful," as a postscript.

It was barely noon, and for the hours preceding my

departure, what programme should I make? Naturally I bethought myself of Vivian Ducie and his colleague Beaumont. They must take me to places filled with people — with all the people in Paris.

Ducie was at the Embassy; Beaumont was away on leave.

"Will you lunch with *me* this time?" I asked Ducie.

He consented, and I, feeling my inadequacy, bade him choose our restaurant; "full of the best people," I added, though it occurred to me, as it had occurred to me in Petersburg before, that if De Jarnac had no wish to be observed or recognised, he would hardly take Joan to the favourite places; and here in Paris, filled with English, with people who might know her and whom she too might know, De Jarnac would be especially upon his guard.

Nevertheless, we lunched amid a crowd of fellow-lunchers, drove in the crowded Bois, and took our tea at Arménonville, most crowded of all. It was May, and everything in Paris was abroad. Everything and everybody but my Joan.

Ducie also had seen nothing of the De Jarnacs, nor had he heard anything; and discussing Petersburg and De Croisnel, "Did you make him pay up?" he asked.

"De Croisnel? Oh, yes," and I smiled, for I had all but forgotten the suggestion of a debt to be recovered which Ducie had mooted on our way to the two Consulates.

He inquired whether I had seen anything of our Embassy staff in Petersburg, and when I mentioned Dampier and Lord Hanley, I think we coincided in our estimate.

"Ryder, the first secretary, is a gem, clever enough to waltz round any Russian — pity you didn't meet him," said Ducie; "I served under him in Uruguay."

"I was only there two days, and Dampier and Hanley were enough."

"Sufficient for two days is the evil thereof," he chuckled; and then, "See that girl in pink?"

I saw her.

"She's Silhouette the dancer."

Ducie was guide, philosopher, and friend till close on dinner-time. "Sorry you're going," he said at last, "and just as sorry I can't stay; but whenever you're in Paris you'll find me here and willing to oblige — ring up the old firm," — he was referring to our Embassy. "Drop in and chance it or waste good money on postage-stamps — just as you like. I'm always ready for a new face, particularly a girl's, if you don't mind my being candid, and the same to you in London. I'll come down on you yet, and make you stay out-of-doors till the clubs shut and Henry Irving's snug in bed," he concluded; and now, like Louis Prévost and the rest of these new Parisian acquaintances of mine, Vivian Ducie too must pass out of this narrative. He has my address, and I have seen him since; vivacious, reckless, informal, irreverent as ever; unreserved when he liked you, close as an oyster when he doubted — not much changed, in short; but so far as the rest of my story is concerned, Vivian Ducie's part is over.

I leave him with regret. He was young and not ashamed of it; he was merry and not ashamed of that, either; to be young and merry and unashamed in this gray world, I sometimes think is charity, benevolence, and piety rolled in one.

Roy met me at Victoria and shared my hansom to the Grand Hotel. No Langham this time; Portland Place

valiant understanding; and to-day her word was law, just as it had been yesterday or any day, reaching to childhood or our earliest memories.

"Mother — begging a favour from you or me or anybody!" he had pursued. "Think of it, Jim! We Gariochs permitting that! And all because of our honour and our name! Mother begging, because of our name; Joan sold, because of our name! Our name — hang our name! The gov'nor, I swear, would give his head to have all this undone and our name in the mud — and his honour, our honour, too! Jim, I'm croaking — croaking like a Radical or some stump speech-maker! You're to promise you'll give up this pursuit and let De Jarnac have his money's worth in peace?"

I gave my promise — for Joan's sake.

"That'll do," said he, "and now let's chuck the subject and go forward."

From that day to this I have not discussed Joan or her husband or her mysterious fate with any Garioch. With no one else, unless my own self count here in my loneliness. The riddle is not yet read; she is as far from me as on that opening day six years ago when I first learned that I had lost her; and yet I hope. . . . There is the portrait that she sent me, in its heavy frame of silver, scarred in the left-hand corner where Arbusoff's bullet was turned aside; and hidden away under the silver and very small, I can read our two initials, there in her writing: "J. S." — the first letter of her name, the first letter of mine. It came to me one morning, addressed in a strange hand and sealed with a strange seal, left here and not posted, brought by some silent messenger who delivered it and went his way.

He gave it to a servant, never hesitating, saying nothing; then he disappeared again, and that is all that I could learn of him.

"A foreigner?" I asked the girl who took it from him. It was a bootless question, for she had never been farther than her native Buckinghamshire.

She stammered over it and could not say for sure.

Six years it is since I left Africa and found my way to Portland Place, standing upright and haggard before Sir Alison and her three brothers. I have kept my promise and made no step towards De Jarnac; yet for all that when his fate came on him, it was I who stood the nearest and saw the daylight leave his eyes. Closed they are now in death, he put away; and I alive, waiting and ever waiting for that hour to strike.

CHAPTER XVII

It is March now and the birds are piping; robins in the hedge, thrushes in the branches, and rogue blackbirds everywhere. The snowdrops have come, the crocuses, even an early primrose in my garden; and the wind howls mightily o' nights, but winter's gone. It is lonely here, but I have long grown used to loneliness. Sometimes I discover I am talking to myself aloud, for lack of other human voice, maybe. I must stop that. If I talk to the old dog, it doesn't matter; there's no harm in that; indeed, I've often seen people do it on the stage, with great comfort to the audience.

The old dog and I, be it said, have become fast friends; he looks out for me now and has the list of all my habits. He knows that I walk twice a day and is ready for me; he knows that if I go up to the station and take a train he must go home alone; he knows that I am sad with youth as he is sad with age. What I do up here at my writing-table, he does not know, nor does he greatly seem to care. Sometimes I tell him fragments of my story; he rubs his old head hard against my sleeve, and we are very confidential. Last week I made him walk a dozen miles or so on a wet day and that near settled him; I had to coax him all the way from Eton, and he was like a kid taken too far without its perambulator; but this week I'm forgiven, and we are intimate as ever.

The river goes its way, with cygnets now turned white

and almost swans; the dabchicks dip and dive industriously, the greatest anglers of these parts; and one morning early I looked out and saw a heron. Last month, during the frost and heavy snowfall, men caught the swans, driving them ashore from boats, tripping them up with hooks tied to long poles as they waddled, binding their wings with rope, and finally flinging them into barns where they would be fed and sheltered till the thaw. The "snow-white" swans looked quite shabby and dirty against real snow. Twice, so far, I have seen boats on the river for pleasure; there was a man in a racing skiff one mild forenoon, and a motor yacht drove past one Sunday. All the rest are strings of barges following dirty little tugs. I often think I'd like to spend a day on one of these.

The trees are naked still, but the buds are swelling; and in the tallest the rooks seem busier than stock-brokers. How they chatter; how they come and go! The husbandman is out, for he has trimmed the hedges and cleared the ditches, and wired and mended, and done his winter's work; in a field to-day a man was ploughing, with water-wagtails all about him eager to glean the riches of each new-turned furrow. They seemed to bounce instead of fly, like acrobats descending in a heap.

All these things and the books I read make up my day; except when I sit up here writing, and remembering, and trying to make anew the strange scenes and the distant voices of the past six years.

Now I will return to 1901 and my interview with Roy. I had given my promise, and this hot pursuit was ended. My leave was over in July, and I went back to the regiment. The next year I left the service, gave up soldiering for good. The fixed routine had been a medicine at first,

but now it irked me; I knew all about it, and my mind was free once more to brood and to hunger and to know no rest. I wanted to be doing, and soldiering meant waiting. I wanted change, forgetfulness, travel, and danger. Peace and settled duties were water, and I wanted wine. I had money, I was independent; a new war would have found me at my post; but there was no new war till two years later, and it was none of ours. I filled up that interval with travel. Perhaps you have come across my two books, the one dealing with Abyssinia and the one telling of my journey across Asia. They brought me some little notice, but, best of all, they gave me an occupation, almost a profession; for, when the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, I had reached Saigon. From Damascus I had got as far as the French Indies; I raced up to Hong Kong, taking the first boat of any speed that went within gunshot of the field of action. From Hong Kong I cabled to six newspapers in London, offering to do their war correspondence. I was on the spot, and had, moreover, some trifling reputation in the right direction. Three accepted me; I chose the penny one; and so embarked upon a new and unforeseen career.

I was with the Japanese and must have done my paper creditable service, for when the war was ended, they asked me to continue on their staff and even seemed concerned as to my future.

"I won't work here," I said, "but if you want a man to go abroad, I'll go abroad."

I think they had a notion I would go to foot-ball matches in the intervals between insurrections, warfare, and the big events. At least, they gave me the chance, declined as

you have seen; and with that I settled down and finished my book on Asia, or such portions of that continent as I had met with in my two years' vagabondage.

One fruit of this exile and adventuring was that I knew some Russian.

Why, it is hard to say, but ever since those two days in St. Petersburg, when I had tried to grope my path through that admixture of an alphabet, the language and the country held a fascination that I have seen occur with other men. No, it had little or nothing to do with Joan; it would have been the same in any case. The thing is a peculiar and, perhaps, a semi-spiritual phenomenon, and, as I said before, it is really not at all uncommon. In your own knowledge, or, better still, in your own reading, you have come across similar instances. Russia is unforgettable. Kipling has a parallel theory about "the East": "If you've 'eard the East a-callin', you won't never 'eed aught else," he makes one of his soldiers sing in a ballad. Perhaps Russia is "the East": many people regard it as such; but, personally, I think it is because Russia proper is the *Christianised* East that, once you have known its mysterious solace and affliction, in pain your heart will always seek that answering melancholy.

Russia is the suffering East; the rest of the East has not been crucified: it suffers in its own peculiar Slavonic way; but that sad consciousness, that consciousness of a far perfection which men call Christianity has hardly penetrated east of Suez or the Caucasus.

To leave this disquisition, however. I knew Russian; not so very much, but enough to travel with; could read it, could write it, could even engage in a simple conversa-

tion. And in the war, during those long intervals of recovery and preparation which armies spend between the shock of battle and their next advance, I had had further opportunity. My Baedeker had long ago been superseded by Motti's grammar, and often there were prisoners who would assist. Once we found a whole troupe of dancing and singing girls, chaperoned by a stout lady, among our captives, and the stout lady spoke French as well as Russian. She was delighted to earn a few pounds by giving me lessons, was fastidious in her tastes and manners, and seemed to regard herself and her British pupil as the only two persons of refinement in that uncompromising camp. The Japanese spoke of her and to her as "the old cow"; to me she was always Madame Tulpánoff. She and her "chorus" disappeared; everything and everybody seemed to disappear and only I remain, fronting the death that would not take me, and the future that promised a long continuance of empty faces, white, yellow, black, with never the face I sought to bid me hope.

And yet I did hope. If not in this life, then the next, I used to say. Three times in all those years I heard her name. A man had seen Joan Garioch in Sicily; at least, he thought it was she, driving on a road outside Palermo; it was only after her carriage had passed him that he had recognised her. Then, again, she had been seen in Norway, and in the Tyrol. I heard these tales and let them circulate; what had they to do with me who had renounced pursuit? And then in the autumn of 1905 I ran across De Croisnel.

He had come over to England for some shooting. Old friends had asked him, and he had secured a clear month's leave. He was no longer in Petersburg, had given up

the diplomatic service, and lived now in Paris where he was attached to the Ministry of Finance.

"A special post," he said; "it is a very good position, and I have been rather fortunate. My experience of Russia has proved useful."

Neither of us was in a hurry; we had met in St. James's Street, a few yards from my club.

"Come in and have a drink and a cigar, or even a *stakhan chi*, if you prefer it," I said, reminding him of the Russian lesson he had once bestowed on me, when he had ordered the waiter of the Hôtel de Londres to provide us with tea in glasses.

We both smiled over this reminiscence.

"Good," he answered, and in a few moments I had him cosily facing me against the fire.

He took tea and buttered toast and a cigarette.

"I've heard all about you," he began; "you've been in Manchuria and seen the defeat of your enemies." Unblushing and light as formerly seemed De Croisnel.

"You had me chucked out of Russia," I now taxed him.

"I had a share in it," he cheerfully admitted, "to save you from something worse. I told you I was your friend — do you remember?"

It was a neat enough way of taking it.

"Well, it hasn't mattered," I replied; "I'd have come away in any case; if not that day, then a few days later."

De Croisnel was or seemed astonished.

"The people I sought for were in Paris all the time."

"They were right," said he; "if one has the choice, give me Paris. Petersburg is rather barbarous — but it has served me well enough."

And then he went on to explain his new position to me. France held between four and five hundred million pounds' worth of Russian securities; had, indeed, a third of Russia in pawn. . . . "Well, they wanted somebody at the Ministry of Finance who knew the country," he pursued, "and the political significance of that is termed the 'revolution.' And behold, I am the man!"

"You have to judge whether the position is serious, or whether it only looks serious?" I asked him.

"That's it," said he, "and I have to assist the two allied governments — don't forget that we are 'allied governments' — in their difficult task of sustaining a falling market. I am a kind of official stock-jobber, with two governments as my clients. Since that October manifesto was proclaimed, I have had sleepless nights."

It was a novel occupation, and one that only a man deep in the confidence of the two governments could have been called upon to fill. Truly, as I had surmised once before, Croisnel must have a political influence or backing beyond the ordinary.

"Russia will be quiet until December," he continued, "and so I am away on holiday. But next month — well, we shall see."

It occurred to me only then that the London paper for which I had worked might have further and immediate need of me.

The same thought, in all likelihood, had come to De Croisnel.

"If there's a revolution, — a real revolution, — you will be called upon to write about it?" he now asked.

"Probably," said I.

"In the newspapers?"

"Yes; the one I worked for in Manchuria will, no doubt, ask me to go to Russia."

"And you will go?"

"Certainly."

The subject dropped, and until we parted, we spoke of other things; but in leaving — I distinctly recall De Croisnel's words in leaving.

"Supposing," he said, "a man very much interested wished to put a man equally interested on a false scent; might he not confirm the other's doubts by emphasising that false scent? For instance, when you were turned out of Russia, is it not possible that you were turned out of Russia because Russia was the very last place in the world where you would find what you sought to find? The strategy is very subtle, I admit. But being forced out of that country, would you not regard it as certain that only one country could contain the object of your pursuit? Whereas, in reality, the country from which you were expelled was the one country in which you would not find certain personages, and your expulsion was merely a manœuvre intended to confirm a strong but incorrect suspicion. Have I made myself clear?" he asked.

"Quite clear," said I; "you or your friends had me expelled from Russia so that I should waste my time and energies on a fixed idea — leave the rest of the world unexplored and confine myself to Russia?"

"You will waste more time and more energy if you return there," he replied; and then, after expressing his delight at seeing me again and offering to look in on me next time he was in London, De Croisnel stopped a passing hansom and was off.

CHAPTER XVIII

DE CROISNEL was right. By December, 1905, the Russian revolution, such as it was, had burst in flame.

During the intervening weeks I had seen nothing of him, but once or twice had reflected on his strange admission and its present purpose. So they had turned me out of Russia to make me concentrate on Russia and neglect all other countries? This might be true; perhaps it was true. On the other hand, De Croisnel may have had further reasons for deceiving me, for adding to what he would, in all probability, regard as my bewilderment. Really, I hardly cared. Croisnel and his friends, if it pleased them, could have this satisfaction: had I not given Roy my promise, their strategy might have met with its reward. As things were, however, it had neither been successful nor unsuccessful. I had long ago abandoned every search or inquisition, leaving the future to take what course fate willed. Joan, or even De Jarnac, was safe from my pursuit. If I met them, if by any chance I met him — well, no one could reasonably hold me responsible for such encounter.

De Jarnac might be in Russia, or he might be elsewhere. All the evidence I had pointed to Western Europe or the South; to Paris, Sicily, Norway, or the Tyrol. His whereabouts, however, was no concern of mine, and if a London newspaper, or the sagacious editor who had invited me to vary my accounts of warfare and the national policies

implied by warfare with equally engrossing reports of foot-ball matches, now asked me to book a new engagement and proceed to Russia, to Russia I would go, quite irrespective of any fancies connected with De Jarnac and the personal injuries that I had suffered.

My diary — I have kept that incriminating abstract for many years — bears under date, December 7, 1905, the following brief entry: —

Am finishing Cardew. Saw P. re Russia. Looks like business.

"Cardew" is a story I was writing. "P." is the sagacious editor aforementioned. Russia we all know. It was very nearly agreed during our interview that I should make ready to set out for that land of desolation and follow the revolution there awaited. Both P. and the revolution looked "like business."

The next few days were spent upon "Cardew." I admire the calm with which I concluded that difficult if fascinating enterprise; yet I suppose poor "Cardew" suffered. A work of art needs repose and an undivided mind. Once or twice I sailed up to Fleet Street and had more talk. The papers, indeed, were alarming. And then, in quick succession, we heard how the Caucasus was ablaze; of the street fighting at Moscow, and how the Baltic Provinces, my special and particular destination, so it appeared, had declared themselves free and established a provisional government of their own. Failing real war, it looked about as good a page of history as one might turn.

"Cardew" was finished and I free to say good-by; my mother and sisters were at Lympne, my father was wintering in Spain. I took train from London, leaving my address; I could get underway at twelve hours' notice.

As readers of the public prints, I found my family considerably affected, nay, even averse to my departure. War they could understand; there was some honour in war; it was a man's profession, a family tradition; they would not have stood in my way had this been war. But a revolution, barbarous, haphazard, and formless, brutal in its detail, even obscene and not unconnected with massacre, torture, and the basest outrage, why take a hand in that?

I laughed away my mother's fears, and, I believe, bullied my sisters into a tearful silence. Glad enough was I to be moving, and small matter the cost. The dear old mater! She read her newspaper — she was usually a week behind with it and trying hard to catch up; she read her newspaper, and believed every word of it. Geographically speaking, she had the pull over most people, which made the business illimitably more exciting. Russia, I am sure, she regarded as a place similar in area to Hyde Park, and packed, positively packed, with bomb-throwers, revolver artists, Cossacks, and other brutal men with bayonets which they stuck into anybody who happened to be passing. The Tsar sat on a bomb-proof throne — something like the Prince Consort in the Albert Memorial; the Empress Dowager drove about dodging Nihilists; and the Grand Dukes — those awful fellows — were hovering around in full uniform, engaged in some terrible if indefinite practices proper to their evil reputation. Whether they were butchering Jews or feeding their pet lions with Christians, was an open question; Grand Dukes they happened to be; and that in itself was sufficient for my mother; and apparently for the more popular newspapers wherein all these wonders were described.

I found, after several conversations with people close at hand, that notions not so very unlike these were prevalent even among the so-called well-informed and academically educated of this island.

Of the vastness that separates city and city; of the tragic destiny which has set man against man in that sad country of gray skies and endless winter, of profound ennui and passionate discontent; of the half-score of peoples and nations whose aspirations and desires had flamed to whitest heat since last October's manifesto, with its promises of liberty and Western freedom, — I found my mother's neighbours were no less ignorant than our enlightened and sagaciously conducted Press. Perhaps I too lacked any clear conception of these vital and significant complexities, and am only wiser after the event.

To me those four, five days of quiet were a respite, full of mine own country and its settled ease. That God made England is my firm belief; that He took especial pains with Kent, I also fancy when my mind turns there. Often when dwelling far away, with thoughts of home, my heart has found the road to those green lanes. An old county and a beautiful is Kent; sea and swelling downs are hers, valley and upland, forest and marshland, and such men and women as are made for friendship and deep love. I suppose the town is making inroads on her gardens, creeping south, and filling her pleasant lands with cockney faces; but still I know an hundred spots with never a strange face in them, where I may enter modestly and take my place and feel that I am home.

I must have been out all day, walking or driving, meeting old friends of those parts or being met; going over to Hythe and Lydd and Saltwood and a dozen haunts, all

gray with age and touched with proudest history. Brave men have lived here since the earliest times, as old stones testify. The little square-towered Norman churches speak for them, and for the virtues of a goodly faith. I was glad that I could spend some days in Kent before I packed my things and went from home.

By the Monday's post I had my marching orders. I was to start at once, after going through the usual formalities at the Russian Consulate. On the Friday night my sisters had given a dance for me; at least, that was how they put it. Incidentally it was for themselves.

I remember the evening perfectly, and especially do I remember two jolly little partners who had been playing hockey all the afternoon and who now, fresh as paint, assisted me in my efforts to close this chapter gayly. I have forgotten their names, seen, no doubt, the first and the last of them, but somehow the freshness and the keelness of these youngsters lingers on my pen, and even at this distance, and perhaps for many a day, I shall recall their happy faces with a peculiar affection.

That Monday morning I went up to town. The poor old mater, very much distressed, came to the station with us and said good-by. That it was not too late to retire from the whole business, the mater hinted, more than broadly, as we waited there. She also gave advice as to how one should deal with "the brutes" when they came a-prodding with those awful bayonets. Once or twice she hid her tears with laughter; but tears were uppermost that day in her old eyes. I am afraid the advice was more ardent than effective; and as to her hints, are they not the hints of mothers all the world over? . . . And so *I was to see no more of my own people till my return.*

I reached London in good time to get my passport viséd, a second one that had served me during the past three years. The first, Vivian Ducie's document, obtained in Paris, had long ago been superseded and suppressed. Its dates — twenty-four hours between my arrival and departure from St. Petersburg — looked too much like, what, indeed, they actually represented, an expulsion.

That day's section of my diary bears the laconic entry, "Left for Russia." Nothing more.

I was alone when I drove down to the station in a hansom, that carried my two kit-bags and a special correspondent fairly under way at last. London, that dim winter's night, was very much itself, damp and muggy and blurred, its gaslight and its white electric globes uncovering the moist darkness, revealing the magnificent sadness of this city of six million mouths.

From my heart I was content to be alone, and solitary, and without the fuss of a departure; and perhaps the city's sadness was in keeping with my mood. Of all that I was leaving, there was nothing that held a promise to my youth; nothing that would follow me into the years and fill the future with a potent melody. I was making no sacrifice in this adventure; no one would miss me but the old, the careless, and a man or two. I had known as much of life as was permitted — too little and too much; and if Death claimed me, took me by the arm and led me hence, letting me down lightly in some far corner of the world — well, I would go so willingly, almost with thanks for this abrupt release.

I remember quite plainly how I thought these things, regretfully, wistfully enough; and how, for all my late

elation, they were there, and I powerless to will or wish them otherwise.

Years ago, when I was twenty-three, I had stood near to Death and shrunk from him with all the pitiful abhorrence of that age of promise. To go then, with nothing done — nothing — oh, nothing done! I had resolved to live, with a tenacity more powerful than drugs or a great sickness. To-day, after ten years, I looked back on that struggle wonderingly, across the bodies of the lost illusions and the faiths that Life had slain. Death kills his tens where Life shall kill his thousands. But Life can vivify. Love's hand steals to the heart and makes that desert bloom; the parched fountains will play again and leap once more to the sunlight. In all this world of dust, love is the one reality, and all its multitude of faces is but the One Face made visible. I preach somewhat to-day; to-morrow — I shall be far upon the road.

CHAPTER XIX

My instructions were to get to Riga, the seat and centre of the Baltic revolution, as best I could. No one quite knew what was happening there; it was my office to clear up this mystery by means of messages, written, wired, or despatched by whatsoever means was handiest, to London. Letters had ceased, the telegraph provoked no answer, and as to trains, none were running to or from the agitated provinces. Courland, Livonia, and Esthonia is the name of them, and even Baedeker, that so fruitful source of information, could tell me little more than that they were covered by immense estates belonging to the Baltic nobility, a caste, German in descent, users of that language, and who for seven hundred years had lorded it over a subject race of peasants known as Letts, originally heathens and sun-worshippers; while in the north one would find another subject race, related to the Finns and called Esthonians. These provinces had three harbours, Libau, Riga, and Reval, and an extensive seaboard; they had frequently changed hands, belonging in turn to the knights of the old Teutonic orders, by whom they had been colonised, to Polish kings, to the Swedes, and finally to Russia.

In Berlin I halted and made inquiries. There was no communication between Russia and Germany, between Russia and anywhere, so it appeared. Bridges had been destroyed, the lines torn up in all directions, and even had the railway system been in working order, the "gen-

eral strike " of post, telegraph, and railway servants would have proved a sufficient obstruction. I was bound for a country that at the moment had passed out of European cognisance. Berlin itself was full of Russian refugees. They had come over how they could, many even in uniforms that had a curious effect amid the Prussian uniforms of Unter den Linden and the Friedrichstrasse. A chance spectator, ignorant of what had occurred outside, would have had some difficulty in deciding whether he was in a German city.

From the capital eastwards, I met sign on sign of this remarkable exodus. How these people lived was difficult to say. Everywhere, from Berlin to the frontier, I came across strings and units of a stampeded population; families, groups, individuals, schoolboys, and students; some cheerful, others forlorn, but all exiled and friendless; men, women, and children — the last invariably gay and unconcerned; all of whom had fled pell-mell, taking what they could with them, and filling Europe with stories that, on the face of them, were rather the result of a too vivid imagination than a sober record of actual experience. One German gentleman whose acquaintance I made in the capital amused me by an offer of fifty pounds for a special message, despatched from my destination, and telling him what to do with the many Russian securities in which he had invested the best part of his fortune. As it was, he stood to lose thousands. I advised him to communicate with a friend of mine, Monsieur de Croisnel, specially attached to the French Ministry of Finance, very experienced in Russian affairs, and even now assisting his government with the very answers of which my prospective client stood in need.

The news about the railway had made me hesitate. Riga was a fourteen hours' journey from the frontier, difficult, therefore, to reach by road; but Riga was also a seaport, and perhaps quite easy to make by water. So on I went to Danzig, hoping to find a ship. No ship was sailing or would sail during the present disturbances, and beyond chancing on the hitherto unsuspected beauties of a town whose mediæval aspects are in a singularly complete state of preservation and discovering here a new colony of Russian exiles, I had made no progress. In the local newspaper, however, I read of the *Volga*.

This was a vessel chartered by the German government and sent on with all possible haste to the principal Baltic ports, whence it had returned laden with as many refugees of German nationality as it would hold. The Danzig paper was full of it. The *Volga* was now lying at Königsberg, where it had just anchored, and would immediately be ready for another expedition. Therefore to Königsberg. Here, even if I were unsuccessful in joining the *Volga*, I would yet be within easy reach of the Russian frontier.

This chilly town, gray, provincial, and perfectly uninteresting, — if I except its massive castle, which seems to be used for no other purpose than providing an enterprising firm of wine-merchants with a gigantic cellarage, — was my unwilling residence for the large half of a week. The *Volga* would not sail; trains would not run. I chafed at the delay, I was bored, I was impatient; morning and afternoon I went down to the station and asked what news had come from Russia and whether they were selling tickets for stations beyond the frontier. Each day I received the same reply. Beyond the frontier was con-

fusion; no trains were running except the Petersburg express; and even that, packed with soldiers though it was, had been derailed, its passengers robbed and left to wander in the snow. Nor did it go to Riga, but only partly in the right direction. Then back I would return to my hotel.

One afternoon I looked in on the refugees who had been brought off by the *Volga*. They were lodged in the fortifications, and the same paternal government which had provided for their safety was now sending them home, singly or in families, to the various towns and villages of their original departure. They were poor people, now doubly and trebly poor, and so unnerved by recent experience that what they told me, while highly exciting and sensational, was in all probability very far from the plain truth. According to them, I was bound for a land flowing with blood and robbery and wild retributions and rumours of all three. Rumours more than anything. Some people set little stock in breeding or gentle birth, holding that, no matter his origin, one man is as good as another. The raw material may be the same — in that I am no expert; but in moments of crisis I have usually found that the man or woman of family and position is a rather more reliable witness than the people led or serving. These refugees had come away in a panic, and they still saw red.

At my hotel, the Hôtel de Berlin, I had been at first too exercised with these personal affairs to give more than a passing attention to my neighbours. At noon the dining rooms were full, the same at dinner-time, — full and packed to overflowing. Often I had to wait. More Russian refugees, I told myself; yet every one of them

was speaking German. I asked the manager who all these people were.

They were the emigrant nobility of Courland and Livonia, my destination.

Their estates had been invaded by the insurgent Lettish peasantry, their castles fired, and they themselves been driven across the border. Such as had stayed had been shot down, ambushed, massacred, replied the manager.

Here was an aristocracy almost precisely similar to that which had escaped from France at the outset of the Great Revolution.

"I am going to the very places that they have left," I told the manager.

He was a busybodyish and affable gentleman whose main duty, so it seemed, was to make everybody feel at home, a purpose partly achieved by instructing his guests in all the gossip of the place, at which occupation he was a regular old woman. Midday and evening, his fine beard and mustachios carefully brushed and scented, his long black coat swaying nobly as he moved, a rosette proclaiming some half-dozen minor decorations in his buttonhole, he would go the round of the dining rooms telling everybody about everybody else. A worshipper of rank, just now he was in clover; and to-day he had secured the choicest titbit of the week. Here was an Englishman actually bound for the ancestral estates of his betitled guests.

It suited my purpose that these people should know, and I was not at all averse to the manager parading his news.

Thanks to his industry and support, that very evening I became acquainted with most of the customers of the

Hôtel de Berlin; barons, princes, counts, their wives and families; better than any, perhaps, with a certain Princess Lieven who spoke English.

From them I learned what, later on, I discovered to be the truth.

The country I was bound for possessed no other government than the Revolutionary Committee, which sat at Riga, and the newly elected councils established in each parish by the insurgent Lettish peasantry. These bodies, though largely at the mercy of agitators brought in from outside, were united in the point that most concerned my new acquaintances. The German landowners were to be driven out of the country, and their property divided among the peasants. This had been the great and conclusive feature of the rebel programme. Several landlords had actually been killed, many had had their lives attempted, one in eight had had his house fired. Now they had fled across the border, and were awaiting the suppression of the revolt by armies sent from the interior.

These people interested me. They were so poor, so proud, and so historic. Many bore famous names, and as to Princess Lieven, whenever I conversed with her I could hardly suppress a smile.

In the popular romances of the day it was just such a princess who was in peril and who laid some difficult task or duty on the adventurous hero, invariably an insignificant person like myself; whereupon said insignificant person, nursing a complete yet hopeless passion for the princess, immediately proceeded to go through fire and water for her.

Now this is exactly what I did.

So these situations actually occur! I laughed inside;

though perhaps in this case the romantic ingredients were wasted or misplaced. For I was very far from nursing a complete and hopeless passion for the princess; while she, young, elegant, handsome, a figure, indeed, to make Mr. Anthony Hope or any of his colleagues cover a chapter with praises of her fascination, was, so far as I could see, a devoted wife and mother with no romantic leanings whatsoever.

Nevertheless, as I said above, it was Princess Lieven who demanded knightly service of me in Mr. Anthony Hope's best vein, making almost at once the customary discovery that here was a messenger who would risk life and limb for her in particular, and for the Baltic nobility in general. And thus it came about that when I left Königsberg my secret pockets, in addition to my ready money, were stuffed with letters which, did they or I or both of us fall into the hands of the revolutionary columns, were enough to have me hanged, drawn, and quartered without the slightest hesitancy. I was loaded with hated names; with those of men who had a price upon their head, with others whose owners had merely had their lives attempted. And here again I discovered that the romance writers were heavily in error; for looking over the addresses in the privacy of my chamber, I noted that at least two-thirds of these messages were addressed to banks or institutions that lend money; from which I inferred that even a princess, to say nothing of attendant counts and barons, may be in need and devote a four-page letter to the delicate operation of raising cash against securities.

CHAPTER XX

SOME days as I sit here I envy those writers who have only to invent. They are not troubled with the thousand claims of actuality: they can go straight ahead, undisturbed by recollection: by fugitive cities met as in a dream, by fugitive faces known and passed yet unforgotten, unforgettable. And so to-day, in parting, I linger over Princess Lieven and her messages; over Baron Grieg, that little humorous fellow in shabby furs who marched into my bedroom with his letter ready sealed and who claimed to be a Scotchman by descent, as I've no doubt he was; over Baron Roenne and his household, living behind barred doors, a price upon his head, and, till assured, suspecting me as a possible candidate for this award. Again I see Baron Kleist and Count Medem, huge and solemn, fearfully and wonderfully bearded, like knights in some old print of Dürer's day. They should have worn armour and carried a lance. They all come back to me as I sit here; a clean, dignified, self-respecting nobility, with Old-World customs and courtesies unchanged since Pre-Napoleonic times. The children kissed the hand of their elders after every meal; the young ladies courtesied and had the shyest and most charming air of modesty imaginable; the young men, their brothers, behaved with a deference and consideration rarely known. A patriarchal, uncorrupted nobility was this, exiled from its lands and from its patrimonies. Cruel some of them may have been,

hard taskmasters — at the moment that was no concern of mine.

Now I had a packet of their correspondence stowed away in a safe place and was leaving by the Petersburg express. I had resolved to chance it. With ordinary luck the train would carry me as far as Dvinsk, and from there I must find means of getting to Riga. At the station they would only sell me a ticket to the frontier. "Very well," said I; and this was the first and the last I have ever seen of Königsberg.

It was night and it was some small hour when we approached Wirballen. There was an air of nervousness and anxiety about everybody on that train. Each one of us was curious as to the other, and nobody seemed to be there who could have stayed away.

Travelling like this, in countries far or near, I find that I, in common with most men similarly placed, have a weakness for one special book that is never emptied. In Manchuria I had come across a correspondent who swore by the "Oxford Book of Verse," a well-used copy of which he always carried with him; in Africa I had met a man with whom "Ruff's Guide to the Turf" served the same end. My book is the Bible; not, so far as I can tell, from any motive of religion, but because the wonder of those pages is never done. To-night I had come to the third chapter of the Song of Solomon and to the fourth verse, when we were ordered from the train. "I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." That fine directness and simplicity had made me pause for a space — and here we were at Wirballen and the frontier.

The same sort of brute was on guard with his one word "Passport?"; the same scene in the customs hall beyond; it was all exactly as it had been in 1901, only — nobody seemed to care.

Our luggage was hardly examined; the possibility of some new chicanery with my passport had occurred to me; all was perfunctory, however, slurred over, finished in a trice. If you want to come to this distracted country you can, seemed to be the official attitude; we won't prevent you.

So small was the traffic that the great restaurant was closed and only a shabby little room set apart for us handful of passengers. There we waited for an hour, all on the alert, anxious, suspicious. A tension was in the air, a strain, that did not cease when we stepped on board our train and moved out into the snow and darkness of the wintry night.

A wagon-load of soldiers went with us, armed and ready for events. Our desultory conversation showed that among a half-dozen passengers I was the only one who carried no revolver.

The railway servants came and went like ghosts, pale, watchful, as though wondering what would happen next; frightened, overawed by our escort. The carriages, lighted by a single candle, seemed mysteriously unreal. I told the attendant to call me half an hour before we got to Dvinsk, locked the door of my sleeper, undressed, and went to bed.

I was a fool to undress, even though my money and the letters I carried were safe in bed with me; for the man never called me till it was time to rush, and when the train had steamed away, I found that he had gone through my pockets overnight, captured my watch and chain, *and all the loose silver that was handy.* He was the only

person who could have unlocked the door; indeed, he had made a great flourish with his confounded key and had behaved altogether as though he were the one person in Russia who could be trusted. I think I ended by laughing at this mischance. The thief was so pale and hungry-looking a wretch; the strike, it was obvious, had hit him hard, he was making next to nothing out of tips, and pay does not count in Russia. He had helped himself and gone on with the train. Well, here I was in Dvinsk, and watches are cheap.

I looked about me and was looked at. The station was occupied by a herd of soldiers who searched me for weapons and asked to see my passport. I was brought before the officer in charge, explained my business to him, and he, tumbling to my rank of captain, invited me to share a pot of coffee, and, better still, told me that later in the morning a train might leave for Riga with himself in command. If so, I could perhaps join him, he said. Evidently my luck was going to hold.

On his coffee the officer took rolls and butter, and on his rolls and butter he took Caucasian cognac, and on his Caucasian cognac he took beer, and on his beer he took bitters, and on this appetiser he took vodka, and on the vodka he took Bessarabian wine, and on everything he smoked the usual cigarette. I did what I could. He had no other business, so it seemed, and the station buffet was, moreover, in his power; his to protect, to cherish, and to guard; to deal with as the spirit prompted or his appetite decreed. While I admired his versatility, he was curious as a child about myself. By degrees he became talkative, and later on highly confidential. The train would start within a couple of hours; it was carrying money

and ammunition for the Riga garrison; the escort would be twenty of his men and a band of Cossacks whose horses were sure to give trouble. I need not buy a ticket, but if I liked, I could pay him. The line had been repaired; patrols were working between every station; and see here.

I followed him. In one of the waiting rooms, guarded by a couple of his men, were prisoners, *Lattischi* — Letts; three women and some men. They spoke to us in their own tongue, but what they said neither I nor the officer could understand. They were all of the peasant class and apparently quite cheerful, as though confident of the justice and ultimate triumph of their cause, or else from that pathetic hopefulness which makes it difficult for simple people to believe that they have sinned and must die quickly. As we stood looking at them, four strangers joined us — Germans. Then the *Lattischi* showed their teeth. I had seen Boers and British, Russians and Japanese, but never hatred between race and race such as these people showed; the Germans, unrelenting and contemptuous; the Letts, feline, with something of the tiger in their slanting eyes. My officer closed the prison door and asked the new arrivals who they were.

The four Germans also wished to go to Riga, and they had heard there was a train. Each had a permit and was allowed to carry arms. They were men of some position, and, apart from politics, pleasant fellows every one, though it was easy to see that they regarded my friend the officer and his troops as so many dogs that must perforce be obeyed, and even conciliated. That they would have shot the Lettish prisoners down without a moment's hesitation had there been opportunity, was equally obvious, *nor was the reason far to seek or altogether unnatural.*

Our train got under way at last, Cossacks, horses, prisoners, infantrymen, and all the rest of it, and then I understood what I had only guessed at previously.

From the window we saw the home of one of them. It stood there black and ruined, a fine and spacious country house, burned to a shell of brick and stone. Barns, stables, and outbuildings had suffered the same fate — tears stood in the owner's eyes as we looked out. The white snow covered what was coverable with its mask of peace, carpeting burnt-out rooms, softening the ugliness of fury and devastation with its brilliant purity. No wonder German hated Lett.

Other houses, fired and laid waste, followed on this one, each within its park of shivering trees, each desolate, empty, with only the gray-black hooded crow amid its gaping ruin. Sometimes Cossacks appeared upon the vast white landscape or at stations, rifles and bayonets slung on stooping shoulders, as they sat their mounts or huddled together in their heavy ulsters. Every now and again my companions would say "new rails" as the train moved with an extra smoothness towards our destination. We went slowly, cautiously, and each of them had a revolver within reach. Once or twice I tapped my chest to see whether my money and the letters were safe within their hiding-place. We passed through forests and then across great plains; three times the horizon was red as from a great burning. "Cremorne," said the Germans, "or Weesen," guessing at the name of the estate. The officer would join us and smoke our cigarettes. He collected all our railway fares and was very happy. And then we slid off the metals, derailed, with the glass flying and bullets singing in through the broken windows.

CHAPTER XXI

WE had just come through a forest on whose edge stood a *Krug*, one of those long, low-lying inns peculiar to that country. A couple of hundred men could have waited in hiding behind this squat and widespread building; the forest might have contained an army. Our officer rose to his feet and then collapsed; a bullet had taken him between the eyes, smashing his cheerful face. His beard was thick with blood. It was a wretched ending to his happiness. The four Germans rushed into the corridor. I turned the dead man over — front and back they had made a hole in him — and followed.

Luckily our train was running on the level, so there was no drop down an embankment, but only a wild ploughing of the snow, a mix-up and a shaking as the buffers met. In the corridor we had the thickness of the walls as a protection, but could see nothing. I felt a bit of a fool at having no weapon,—one always does when shooting is toward,—but nevertheless made for the door and sat down on the step outside.

The firing came from the forest on our left and from those windows of the *Krug* which covered us — a regular hail with little intermission. Strategically, the thing was perfect. Our escort answered, emptying its magazines but having no mark. The officer in charge of the troop of Cossacks, a brave fellow taken unawares, stood in the *snow*, bareheaded, his tunic open, calling to his men and

bidding them come out. He lasted a long minute. The first bullet that hit him knocked the revolver from his hand, smashing his arm and making him spin a half-circle — the damaged limb wagged like a tail. It was butcher's work. His men might have kept down the fire. They let him go, and he fell broken with a score of wounds, defenceless.

We made a beautiful target, with only wood to save us from that hail. The revolutionaries fired from behind stone, or else from out the blackness of the forest. The two officers of our escort were dead; their men blazed away madly till they had spent the last cartridge. Luckily for us five! The fire all went to the one quarter, and we of the rear compartment were hardly noticed.

The noise must have shaken the soldiers more than the bullets; lead on stone is nothing, but lead on wood and wood roofed in is like the angry slamming of a thousand doors. The horses of the Cossacks began to escape, leaping from wagons and then rushing aimlessly about upon the snow, masterless, bleeding, and wild with fright. The few men that came into the open doubled and turned till they were dropped like rabbits. I had never seen so muddled an affair. "Why don't you take charge?" I said to the Germans. "They wouldn't follow us," the oldest of the four replied. "Men'll follow anybody," said I. He measured the distance that separated us from the escort. "We're in civilian clothes and it's too far," he added. "Try the back door and chance it." He shook his head. Russian and Baltic German would not mix, it seemed.

Till the firing had all but ceased we saw no single man of the attacking party and could only stay there helpless, uncertain as to the number of the revolutionaries, ~~their~~

leadership, and what this fight portended. The lull came and we waited; and then a band of men and women, till this moment hidden behind the *Krug*, rushed into the open and made towards us over the hard snow. A man on horse-back and dressed in some kind of military rig was foremost. Out of the *Krug* men poured. The forest became alive. Our Cossacks and the infantrymen had a fine target now, but they were silent. There must have been close on a hundred of them left, and they could have gone forward with the bayonet; instead, they looked on stupidly from out their dead and wounded. Red flags waved over the oncoming horde; they rushed towards us amid cheering and the crack of rifles fired into the air.

The four Germans had come to where I was watching, and one, the youngest, before we could divine his purpose or lay hands on him, was off by himself and picking his way over the snow. He was deathly pale, poor lad. He crossed that open space with a desperate courage, emptied his revolver quickly, then reloaded, fired four more shots into the advancing Letts, and, giving them no chance to close with him, blew out his brains. He had bagged three men. We lost him for a moment in the crowd that was on to his body, slashing it with swords or pouring bullets into what was already lifeless.

The Cossacks, brave enough when working against an inferior foe or unarmed men, had now sheltered themselves behind the prisoners I had seen in the waiting room at Dvinsk. Several of these had wounds given them by their own people. They were recognised, questioned, embraced, and set at liberty with much rejoicing; weapons were thrust into their hands, and the three Germans and myself taken *in their stead*. The remaining infantrymen were captured,

too, their rifles seized and distributed. For the dead and injured nobody seemed to care, and as to the living and unharmed, it seemed as though we were to be dealt with after the company had attended to the contents of the train.

The man on horseback evidently had all necessary information; was, indeed, well prepared for us. He gave his orders, and sleighs, hitherto in hiding, came racing from the *Krug*. Cases of ammunition were flung into them and bags of silver. The train was speedily emptied and the main business of this ambushade complete.

While this was going forward, the stampeded horses of the Cossacks were being caught and ridden, often with laughable results. Bottles were produced and circulated; cheese and bread and sausages came mysteriously to light. The whole scene was very much like a fair; here order, there confusion, everywhere a good deal of speechmaking, shouting, and argument, above which, from time to time, one heard the voice of the mounted man giving his commands in Russian. A Lett translated, and he was scrupulously obeyed.

We four, the Germans and myself, had been put on one side and left in charge of a half-dozen men with Brownings, short stubby magazine pistols that take eight cartridges and can kill at 250 yards. They are the favourite weapon of the revolutionaries. I had often heard about them, but never seen one till this day. For some reason unexplained the newspapers describe them as "revolvers." Nothing "revolves" about them, however. The spring of the magazine just jerks up a new cartridge and throws out the old one, till the whole eight are gone; then you recharge. I was given quite a little demonstration by the

ment I could find a messenger I would have a rattling good story for our warlike cockneys sitting serenely over eggs and bacon. My money was safe behind my waistcoat; and so far the letters I had brought from Königsberg were unsuspected.

CHAPTER XXII

So we moved forward in the clear winter's sunshine over that hard dry road. My furs kept me warm; I had rubber boots and fine lambskin gloves brought back with me from Manchuria; my astrakhan *schapka* covered head and ears. Really, it was magnificently exhilarating. The cold, downright and bracing, the bright keen air, the sparkling snow and a good horse, the unexpected and romantic nature of this interlude, worked on the blood and made one half inclined to sing aloud. It was difficult to believe that only yesterday I had been treading the dull gray streets of Königsberg and living among a people that was admonished by officialdom at every hundred yards; that I was but a two days' journey from London, where nothing happens save art and dismal politics, where men and women want to live forever and travel about in Tubes.

I had never before been on the road in Russia. The striped verst posts came and went, sticking out high above the snow — they are just like the gondola posts one sees in Venice. The ditches were abysmal, a nine-foot drop on either side; and there was neither hedge nor anything to block the view of plain and forest. Such forests! Ranged upon the edge of miles of snow, keeping a perfect line! Black, symmetrical, tragically decorative, they stood like magic armies halted at a signal and frozen there forever. Out of them no bird sang, one saw no touch of

winter's green. Then over the shimmering plain once more, with here and there an isolated farm-house flying its red flag and anxious faces pressed against the window-panes. Great nests amid topmost branches, one to every clearing in that waste, told of last summer's storks, flown south again. Sometimes a magpie, perched on a bare tree, looked down upon us; sometimes we saw a squirrel; the gray-black hooded crow was everywhere. So we went forward.

The Letts themselves were strange to me as the landscape. Fair, blue-eyed, with a peculiar dead-white skin, they were distinct, totally different from all other peoples that I had known. There was something catlike in the short and sloping forehead, the slanting eye, and stealthy motion of this peasantry. The Russian infantrymen had the open and simple faces of fox terriers; the Letts were of a type more complex and more cunningly disposed. The men wore clothing almost European; the women, stuffed and bolstered above the waist, had bright scarlet petticoats and high felt boots shod with removable slippers of soft leather. All these people were country folk, weather-stained, unkempt, except the man on horseback who commanded.

He was a serious taciturn man, this revolutionary leader. He asked me a good deal about England, however, and whether public opinion was with the revolution or against it; also whether the newspaper I represented was Liberal or Conservative. In both instances I was able to give him the right answer, although I permitted myself the remark that what was regarded as Conservative in England would, perhaps, in Russia seem violent and wildly Radical. The Conservatives, for instance, considered themselves our

Heaven-sent constitutionalists. He seemed surprised at this. For a long time after we rode in silence, I enjoying my own reflections, he absorbed by his.

It was success or Siberia with him, or worse. He had the pale exalted face of men who stake their lives on an idea. An unutterable sadness filled his eyes when in repose, sad as this landscape of black forests and white snow. My own trouble seemed small and worth nothing beside the tragic mission imposed on him. With me my sorrow would die; with him a selfish and a finite grief had little place. He was only one of thousands, an obscure and nameless man, whose all counted as nothing and was there — life, happiness, substance — to be lost in the chances of a vague and pitiless destiny. So we went forward.

I had no watch, but it must have been something after one o'clock when we rested and made a meal. An old hand, I had taken the precaution of buying several roubles' worth of eatables at the frontier station. These I now laid out and was assisted by our leader. Strolling down the line, I discovered the three Germans, tied to a tree but otherwise unharmed. I gave them a packet of chocolate, which they were allowed to divide as best they could. The Russian infantrymen enjoyed a more gracious hospitality; indeed, they were being made much of by their new confederates.

As we picnicked I learned where we were bound and our direction. The revolutionaries had seized Kreutzburg, one of the largest castles of those parts, and instead of burning it down with the rest, were now using it as a seat of government. It was here that our leader had his headquarters, thither he was returning, and there, with to-day's booty, he would be at nightfall.

I told him it was necessary that I should go straight to Riga.

He thought for a space, then drew me a rough map upon the snow. I must take the posting road, an hour from there. He could let me have a spare sleigh, and if I kept to the highroad, I would have no difficulty in procuring fresh horses. He must find me a Lettish driver who spoke German, so as to avoid trouble with the language, and with such a guide, it was very unlikely I would be stopped or interfered with by the peasantry. If all went well, and if I kept at it all night, I ought to be in Riga early next morning.

This was good enough, and I asked him to procure his driver.

He soon found a man, an intelligent-looking old fellow who spoke German, was glad enough to earn a bit of money, and not at all unwilling, so I judged, to take a holiday from the more serious business of insurrection.

This having been arranged to everybody's satisfaction, I exchanged my horse for the spare sleigh, put my luggage on board, and was making ready to set out when a far-away report startled us, and something heavy came whizzing overhead. It buried itself in the snow and was followed by a second explosion.

"Guns!" said I.

A third shell came along, and then a fourth, and looking out across the plain, we discovered three squadrons of mounted men and a couple of cannon in position.

The revolutionaries did not wait for more.

Exposed as they were, taken in the open, an excellent mark, they bolted. Pell-mell they bolted, making for the

nearest wood. Only the man on horseback kept his head, holding his sleighs together, forcing them back upon the road, brandishing a pistol and threatening to shoot the first driver that faltered. He had his way, and soon they were going before him like a flock, wildly and with all possible headlong speed. It was fine to watch them racing into the horizon.

The cavalry came on, dragoons with drawn swords and revolvers. At first they came on cautiously, shells sailing overhead and covering the advance. A few shots were exchanged, but there was nothing in the nature of an attack or a resistance. It was very pretty and something like a battle in a play. The rebel leader, with his booty, was far off on the road, driving furiously and hard as he could pelt. The rest of the band had evaporated, was swallowed and lost in the surrounding woods. Of the whole insurgent camp there remained but the three Germans tied to their tree, the dozen or so of Russian infantrymen, and myself sitting comfortably on my Lettish driver. He had shown a disposition to follow his compatriots; I had no wish to be left stranded in that desolate place; so, consulting my own convenience, I had pulled him off the box at a venture, flattened him out, and was using him as an unwilling cushion when the dragoons came up with us.

For the second time that day I was taken prisoner. The three Germans were set upon their feet and arrested, as were also the Russian infantrymen, now shamefaced and crestfallen, their recent political conversion seemingly extinct.

The dragoons contented themselves with this easy capture and waited with us for the main body. The guns had been put up and presently the whole column of three

hundred mounted men closed in on us. I helped my driver to his box again. "It's all right," I said; "you won't be hurt. You're my servant and there's an end of it." But this heretic even seemed to doubt a special correspondent. Still, the dragoons were all about us, and it was safe to let him take the reins again.

A colonel was in charge with four more officers. The position of the three Germans was easily explained and understood. The infantrymen could be accounted for. Who was I who sat in a sleigh with two kit-bags and a trembling Lettish driver?

I told the colonel all about it.

He was a Russian and obviously incredulous; nor did my nationality and profession produce the same effect with him as with the revolutionaries. The British fleet, apparently, troubled him not at all.

I offered him my passport.

"Passports," he growled, "one can buy all the passports one wants for five roubles!"

I asked him to interrogate the three Germans. They had seen me join the train at Dvinsk and been with me ever since.

He cut me short. "That is nothing," he said; and at this point one of his subordinates stepped up, saluted, and offered a suggestion.

"It is, perhaps, Maxime," observed the newcomer.

Maxime, I afterwards discovered, was the leading revolutionary agitator of those parts, an almost mythical hero, famous for his fiery eloquence, but even more renowned for the variety and scope of the disguises wherein he had escaped pursuit.

The colonel's face lit up. Yes, I must be Maxime

disguised as an English correspondent. They had him at last! The colonel was in high glee over his capture.

I had no remotest idea who or what this Maxime was.

"And what do you propose doing with me?" I now asked.

"You will be sent to Riga as quickly as possible; and there —" The colonel waved a hand about his throat.

Nothing could have been more fortunate.

CHAPTER XXIII

I WAS Maxime and would be sent to Riga, and there — the colonel of dragoons had waved a hand about his throat, a gentle hint that mine was to be slit upon arrival.

I was feeling very sorry for this colonel. Sooner or later it would be my bounden duty to ruffle his illusion and spoil the credit of so rare a capture. Perhaps, even, he would be made to look absurd, a foolish, credulous old duffer, as, indeed, he was and probably still is. At the moment, however, I was Maxime; and as Maxime was a person who would be conducted to Riga with all possible despatch, I had no objection to so fortunate an interpretation of myself, the sleigh, and my two kit-bags. The soldiers, gunners, and dragoons shared their leader's enthusiasm; dozens of them rode up and had a look at me. "Maxime — it is Maxime," they cried, staring and nodding and laughing. Never was greatness thrust upon a more unworthy object than myself.

I was permitted to retain my sleigh and Lettish driver; a strong guard surrounded us; and forward we went with the colonel's column till it was dusk.

Towards evening the whole body of us was halted, and fresh horses, obtained from a posting station on the road, were harnessed to the sleigh. "You will allow me?" said the most intelligent-looking of the colonel's officers, and took the seat beside me. Twenty dragoons were mustered

as an escort, and the colonel himself came round to put the finishing touch upon these preparations. He gave his orders and repeated them, whether for my benefit or not, I cannot say. We were to go clean through the night, change horses at Ringmundshof, and not draw rein until we came upon the outposts of the Riga garrison. I was to be delivered straight into the hands of the general in command, and the officer accompanying me would be held personally responsible for such delivery. If I tried to escape, I and my driver were to be shot down; if a rescue were attempted, I and my driver were to be shot down. Dead or alive, I must be brought to Riga. The colonel did not spare me.

The officer gave the word, and we were off. He had apparently been selected for this duty because he was a Baltic German, would know the country and its languages, and would, moreover, nurse a special hatred for such Baltic revolutionaries as this Maxime whom I, perforce, now found myself impersonating. He was a smart, nice-looking young chap, and his features, every time I studied them, seemed to recall a face met with before. The column disappeared in the dusk and shadows. He and I and our escort moved on in silence. We went along at the trot, doing our eight or nine miles an hour easily. By and by he lit a cigarette, and I produced a pipe.

He spoke English quite well and with an intonation that, like his pleasant face, I almost recognised. When — where? And then suddenly the likeness dawned upon me and was real.

“Do you know a Princess Lieven who is living at Königsberg?” I asked him.

“Princess Lieven is my sister,” said he.

I told him I had seen her only yesterday, lunching and dining at the Hôtel de Berlin.

From that moment his reserve was dropped and conversation flourished. He introduced himself to me as Baron Lothar Fircks, lieutenant in one of the Petersburg hussar regiments and temporarily attached on special duty.

I gave him all the news I could, answered his questions, and told him how it was faring with the friends and relatives who were at Königsberg.

"Do you still believe I am Maxime?" I then asked, laughing.

"No," said he, "and never did."

"But your colonel and the other officers?"

"Are Russians, and will believe anything."

"Why didn't they make a better fight of it?" I asked.

"Fight!" said he; "there'll be no fighting here. In Russia there is never fighting, only massacre."

I told him what had happened to my train and how a couple of shells had sent the Letts a-flying.

"What can you expect," he asked, "from peasants? The Letts are just like any other mob, and they were slaves till ninety years ago. Have you ever studied Russian politics?" he pursued, and waited for my answer.

"Only in books," said I.

"Well," he rattled on, "I will give you a complete programme of this revolution. Here in the Baltic Provinces are Germans and Letts. The Russian government says, 'If they fight, they will so weaken one another that they will give me no trouble.' The government has provoked the fight, and it will look on till the right moment. We Germans will then be sufficiently weakened, our houses

burned, our prestige gone. The Letts will be preparing their Lettish republic; and then an army will be sent from Russia to destroy them as we are being destroyed. After that there will be quiet in the Baltic Provinces for thirty years, when all may possibly start over again. To-day the Letts are living in a fool's paradise; to-morrow even our colonel may send his dragoons upon them."

I told him of the man on horseback and the determination I had read on that stern face.

"An imported Russian," said Fircks, "but look at the material he has to work with. His followers will leave him at the first real danger; he will be dead or over the frontier when St. Petersburg begins in earnest. And they will begin soon, for St. Petersburg wants money and cannot borrow with a revolution in the house. A new loan, and you will see the revolution 'suppressed' within a month. Then I and my brother officers will be undistinguishable from ordinary murderers."

He lit a fresh cigarette. "You may judge that I don't enjoy this business," he concluded; "I am not allowed to help my friends, and I have no special wish to murder my enemies. The Russians, Cossack or dragoon, do as they are told. We here are all strangers to them, foreigners, Protestants, living in a strange land, speaking strange languages."

We talked most of that night, much in the same strain; I learning a good deal about the situation I was presently to report on, Fircks letting off steam. In the darkness we came to Ringmundshof and a new column of dragoons, quartered round a railway station. My Lett put in fresh horses, and away we went.

I told Fircks of the Lett and the way I had made sure

of his services. The young lieutenant had seen me sitting upon him and laughed as I explained. In the Lettish language he told the old fellow not to be afraid, that he would be set free at Riga if he would promise to go back to his home and have no further dealings with the revolutionaries.

The old man thanked him and promised eagerly.

"He wants to die in his bed," said Fircks, "and very naturally. But revolution is the latest fashion just now and difficult to avoid."

The young lieutenant was really very tolerant. He had been born and bred among this people, they had been about him from childhood, and their rising he regarded more as a momentary wave of madness than as a serious and final break between his race and theirs.

In the dawn we came upon the outskirts of Riga and marvelled at their silence. Not a soul was abroad, we met neither policeman nor patrol. It seemed as though we were approaching a city of the dead.

The small wooden cabins grew into streets, the streets became suburbs, a factory and its chimneys rose above the low, evil-looking houses of this approach. Then came other factories, and we were in a town built of wood, squalid, silent, untenanted, whose only inmates seemed to be ourselves—a handful of dragoons conveying a prisoner. A window was flung open, and some one had a shot at us. "Forwards!" cried Fircks, and now we went at the gallop.

It was broad daylight when we came to the river and the first patrol, a group of infantrymen who opened to let us pass. We clattered over the wooden bridge, before us Riga, the ancient town herself, with wharves and shipping and soaring Gothic spires, the dull, blind walls of the old

castle touching the water's edge. Fircks gave the word, and now we trotted as before.

A sharp turn to the left and we were in the castle square; then through a gateway and to the official quarters of the general commanding the garrison.

"I have to obey my orders," said Baron Fircks; "the general is a sensible old gentleman, and I think we will all be laughing over this incident by the time we get to breakfast."

Our sleigh and the escort were left in the castle yard. Fircks, myself, and two troopers marched to the general's quarters.

The general was having his coffee and came to us wiping his mustache. Like Fircks he was a German, a soldierly, upright little bantam in undress uniform, with the red cross of some order hanging round his neck.

Fircks saluted. "The compliments of Colonel Palkin," he said, "who begs to hand over to your Excellency the notorious revolutionary agitator Maxime, whom he discovered near Krentzburg disguised as an English newspaper correspondent." The baron had his lesson by heart.

The general came towards me and looked me up and down.

"Is this a joke?" he asked.

"I obey Colonel Palkin's orders, your Excellency," replied young Fircks.

"This is not Maxime — no slightest resemblance," said the general; and addressing me, "Who are you?"

I handed him my card.

"You will have an excellent story for your journal," said he.

"I could not have had a better," was my reply.

The general smiled. "Have you any papers?" he asked.

I was waiting for this.

I had reached Riga, my personal safety was practically assured, and I could quite prudently unload.

I unfastened my waistcoat, and from the secret pocket where they had reposed, pulled out the handful of letters that I had brought from Königsberg.

"This is better than a passport," said I, spreading them on the official table. "Baron Lothar Fircks, I have even one for you," and I gave the young lieutenant the envelope which bore his name.

He tore it open.

"Yes, it is from my sister," he said; and reading the opening lines, "You are her 'English messenger'?" He passed the letter on to the general.

His Excellency laughed.

"Please forgive us," he apologised; "it has been a ridiculous mistake."

"On the contrary," said I, "I am doubly in your debt. There is that excellent story of which you spoke, and without your colonel's very kind assistance and his escort, could I have come so safely and so promptly through to Riga?"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE life of a special correspondent is often dull. There are days when nothing happens, weeks when nothing happens; and then he becomes a futile figure, living among strangers, haunting a dull hotel, superfluous in a city where he has neither friend nor enemy; no one to love, to hate; no occupation save waiting and wondering and cursing himself for leaving the good place where he belonged. In Riga, however, I suffered no such interlude. That first day — let me attempt to picture that first day.

I took leave of the general, of Baron Fircks; then on to the Hôtel de Rome. Here I dismissed my friend, the Lettish driver. I paid him well; we had had some stirring hours together; he took my hands and kissed them — it is an uncomfortable custom when one is not used to it.

The hotel was empty; everything was empty, the streets, the boulevards, the great square with its depth of snow. It was the "general strike" which had done this thing. Newspapers have described it: how cabs and tramways had ceased running, how post and telegraph and rail and light and water had vanished from the earth; how every shop was shut, and labour sat indoors, armed, watchful, ready to obey those unknown powers which had decreed that there should be neither work nor wage nor any normal thing.

Part of that day I sat indoors and wrote; part I spent in delivering the letters that I had brought from Königs-

berg. I will begin with the letters, for they made me many friends. Each house I entered was locked and barred. I was scrutinised and admitted. Then up to the first or second floor, as the case might be. There was always a chain on the front door, and had I been a robber chief, the maid could not have eyed me more fearfully. I asked for the master. He came suspiciously. I gave him his letter. The chain was unfastened, and I received the thanks of an individual bristling with revolvers. At the banks I went to it was worse. They were open with half the clerks forming an armed guard, troops in the cellars, and revolvers sticking out of every pocket.

I paid a visit to the British Consulate where reigned peace. And better than peace, the consul, bless him, told me of a ship that was leaving for Hull that very evening. Down to the quays I went, found the captain of this vessel, and so my first message was safe for London. On the quays were thieves and a dead policeman newly shot. A patrol was carrying off the body. The thieves waited till they had gone, and then stole several hundred yards of timber.

I had never seen open-air, daylight thieving before. It is irresistibly comic, reminding one of the harlequinade that winds up a Christmas pantomime. The thieves shouldered their lengths of timber, and strolled off with them, going faster and faster till they broke into a run. There was no one after them, but habit or conscience, or whatever one might call it, would not be denied. All the quays were stacked with cargo left there by the strikers. It was a good place to go a-thieving in.

After dark the only people in the streets were frightened policemen protected by handfuls of soldiers. Sometimes

this emptiness was interrupted by bands of men going forward as if upon an errand. One such group I followed. They stopped at a restaurant where a few people were dining by candle-light. Six went in; the other six kept the door. I went in too. There was a short conversation at the buffet. I ordered some dinner. "Who are these men?" I asked the waiter. "They are sent by the federated committee," said he; "they have just collected two hundred roubles."

The proprietor had paid. He had the money. The men were armed; there was no protection; he had to look pleasant and pay up. Similar taxes were being levied all over the city. At first there had been some resistance; the revolutionaries had not hesitated to shoot; now their word was law.

After dinner I sat alone in my room at the hotel. The Hôtel de Rome is a large hotel, and my room was on the third floor and clean away from any other person's room. It gave on to a long remote passage. I sat writing by candle-light with my door locked. Far below was the empty square lit by the whiteness of the snow and a new moon. The sole thing that moved there was soldiers. A patrol would go by, a fresh one would come, then emptiness again. Three times I heard the sound of shooting, the crack of pistols, the answer of rifles. I was too tired to go out again. The day had been a long one and full of strange experiences, I had been on the road all night, and the night before I had slept for a few hours in a train. I jotted down things in my diary, made out a list of expenses, and was very, very tired. There was just I and the two shaded candles in that large room. Most of it lay in shadow or in semi-darkness. Some one was turning

the handle of my door and trying to enter, and for the first time in my life I knew fear.

I unlocked the door and a roughly dressed stranger stood in the shadows of that long and ill-lit passage far away from any inhabited portion of the vast and silent house. He and I seemed alone in the world together, and I was ready to kill him. I hated myself for being so afraid, and the more I hated myself, the nearer I was to murdering this dark and shabby man.

He mumbled and snuffled and produced a parcel. I was watching him, ready to beat the life out of his face at the first suspicious gesture. If he had put a hand in his pocket, if he had moved too quickly, I stood at the table behind my candles ready to kill him. He unfolded the paper and handed me a pair of trousers. They were my own trousers, those I had worn while travelling. I had asked a servant of the hotel to get them pressed for me, and here they were. This shabby little tailor had brought them in. I paid him and was humble.

He went. I locked my door again. "You're not safe to be trusted just now," I said to myself; "you had better go to bed."

The next morning various people left cards upon me, and it appeared I was a hero instead of the abject coward I took myself to be. The people for whom I had brought letters called, always in twos and threes, bringing friends with them. Each carried a revolver under his fur coat. Somehow they knew my story: how the train had been derailed, the skirmish on the road, my arrest, and how the colonel had taken me for Maxime. It was a stupendous story, and at the base of it, though here unrecognised, was Princess Lieven — the inevitable princess! Again I

laughed over her and even admitted that there was truth within the fictions of that school to which she really if unwittingly belonged.

That day my friends in England must have felt uneasy for me. Weeks later I discovered that our more dramatic newspapers had headed their Russian telegrams with "Riga in Flames" on that same morning, a daring invention which caused Russian stock to drop three points. To have sold a respectable "bear" the day before would have been a handsome stroke of business. I thought of De Croisnel in this connection, and wondered whether the French and Russian ministries of finance had profited by his advice.

Riga was not "in flames," but it was dead; the revolutionaries feared to disarm the garrison, the garrison was too weak to attempt more than patrolling and similar demonstrations against the revolutionaries. The only thing that really flourished was the "general strike."

During the first week of my stay in this dead city I was a man befogged. Then the vapours lifted, and some order came through all this chaos. Personalities appeared, official and unofficial, — a hidden, secret life to which I found the clew. Here were two governments: that of Russia, collecting its forces till prepared to strike; the government established by the revolutionaries, wasting time and strength with timorous inaction, with braying in Lettish newspapers, with speechifying, with discussing what should be done with spoils that no one had the courage to conquer. All this is ancient history, the story of a failure that has been and may occur again.

The Russians knew what they did *not* want; the revolutionaries had no programme, or a thousand programmes —

which comes to the same thing. One afternoon I heard that same Maxime whom my colonel thought to have captured. He was an eloquent fiery speaker, vastly humanitarian, who finished a brilliant performance with the production of a revolver and the declaration that he would never be caught alive. If they got him, he would blow his brains out. It was very fine, but it wasn't war.

Out in the open country other things were happening. There the peasants had formed themselves into armies and were laying waste the big estates. We heard a thousand rumours and reports, gross, exaggerated, as all things are in such a time. One day I fell in with an old gentleman wandering like King Lear, white-haired, tragically disordered, clinging to a box of valuables and an only son. He was a Baron Korff, whose house had been burnt down about his ears, himself left bare and ruined in the snow. His peasants had turned against him, every one. Eighty years old he was and more. "They might have waited," he kept on saying; "they might have waited."

It was this encounter, more than anything else, which settled my determination to leave Riga for a spell and seek some place where I could watch the revolution in all its nakedness. I discovered that the most resolute area was Western Courland, and that the most exposed castle in Western Courland was owned by a Baron von der Bruegen, whose brother Fritz was among my new acquaintances. Towards the last week of December I managed to secure a sleigh, two good horses, and the Lettish driver of my earlier adventure. Fircks recovered him for me, and the old fellow was quite happy to get upon the box again and cry "*byrrrrrh*" where our men say "gee-up."

CHAPTER XXV

AN, the open country and danger — how one looks back on them from all the ordered places; from the cold security of cities, from the peace and quiet spell of settled landscapes, tamed and measured and enclosed! As we drove out of Riga one dark night, Fritz von der Brueggen in his sleigh, I in mine, I seemed to hear the laughter of delighted gods. Movement is music, and the unexplored a fairy tale told over in one's heart.

Each of us had a companion; we were four, with official permits to carry arms. Fritz Brueggen had received tidings from Tuksum, a small town near the family estate. A rebel force was mustering at that centre; Schloss Durben, the Brueggen castle, was in danger; he had collected a brother and a friend, I had volunteered, and here we were, driving out and away to swell the number of the garrison.

George Brueggen, who drove with me, carried a Winchester; Baron Hahn and Fritz Brueggen, in the first sleigh, had Mauser pistols, which are almost as good as carbines; I had a Smith and Wesson, a five-chambered revolver that makes a noise. I didn't want to hurt anybody, — a newspaper correspondent is essentially a non-combatant, — but to sit still under fire at close quarters is like getting one's face punched and no arms or legs to stop the punching. The two servants and my old Lett had Brownings; so, all told, we were a small but compact body of seven men, driving in a pair of sleighs, close to-

gether and ready for events. If everything went well, we would reach the castle before the darkness lifted. Baron Brueggen knew that we were coming, and would probably meet us on the road.

An hour or so after leaving Riga we drove straight into a storm. "This is lucky," said my companion; "it'll keep everybody indoors."

It may have been "lucky," but it was the most pitiless storm I have ever struggled against. A blizzard of sleet lashed us, and our faces felt as though they were being whipped and stabbed at with a million needles. The wind, tearing over that bleak desert of defenceless plain, was thick with tiny points of ice, and we were in the teeth of it, entirely at its mercy. A child would have cried with the pain, and how men and horses went through that blinding darkness was a riddle. It persisted, and there was no escaping. All I could think of was to loosen my muffler and tie it under my chin, as people do when they have toothache. "I'd sooner be shot at than this," I said to George Brueggen, deep in his furs. He laughed. "I hope it keeps on all the way," he answered, "till we are safe in Durben."

The wind dropped and this torment ceased. The clouds broke, and a rising moon hoisted itself above the ragged edges of the sky. The country changed from level and interminable fields of snow to something more varied, our road dipping and ascending, curving through wood and forest, till at last we swept down into a steep gully that cut a path where the pines reached thickest and blackest and deepest right and left of us, rising high overhead, and casting their shadow across all that they enclosed and held imprisoned in their sinister profundity. The road, even

the very airs, seemed darkened and made solid with the night.

We slowed on the ascent, and my companion, moving silently, without a word, picked up his rifle and sat alert, watchful, communicating his readiness to me by that subtle magnetism which always arises in such moments.

We came up to wide skies again and the open road. George Brueggen put down his weapon and leaned back relieved, explaining his silence with, "I didn't want to alarm you just now, but several parties have been ambushed in this place." I shall always like him for the quiet consideration of that little speech, his keeping the evil thing back from me till we were past the haunted spot and his own suspense was ended.

We had made three parts of our journey when the leading sleigh stopped short. My old Lett pulled up in time to avoid a collision. "What is it?" cried George Brueggen; and "The devil only knows!" came in reply. Out we jumped to see what was the matter.

Hahn and Fritz Brueggen had backed their horses perilously near the ditch, and were stooping over something in the road.

"We drove over them," said Hahn.

"Two bodies," said Fritz Brueggen, "and quite cold." He withdrew his hand suddenly. "This fellow's got no face," he ended.

George struck a match.

"Frederick Lamsdorff," he cried, "Frederick Lamsdorff; and that must be Victor Roenne. I was at school with Victor Roenne!"

"They left Riga last night," said Fritz Brueggen; "I asked them to wait for us — heavens, they must have been

lying here since yesterday! No more matches, George," as his brother struck another light; "I forbid it!"

"Small shot and both barrels point-blank," was George's answer.

We took a body into each sleigh, the thing weighing limp and heavy across our feet; then on again in silence.

Our turn came a dozen versts from there, when George had just said, "Half an hour more and we'll be home."

I remember a thin wood of firs climbing a hillside and we below it on the road. They shot down on us, and we could only see the flashes, answering at these. But we did answer, and promptly! The driver of the first sleigh whipped up his horses, Hahn and Fritz Brueggen firing from the rear, the extra man on the box using his Browning. But my old chap, — I laugh at him now, — there was a long moment during which I found myself ramming a revolver barrel into the small of his back and not far from letting him have the whole five cartridges. At the first flash from above he had lost his head, come to a dead stop, and, when he recovered, was for turning the horses round and driving back — to Riga!

George Brueggen stormed at him too, using the man's own language, and shoving the muzzle of his rifle clean in the poor old fellow's face. It was no time for hesitations or politeness. We got going at last, and when the Lett did begin, he certainly was a flyer. Apart from this diversion, I remember only the supreme excitement of exchanging shot for shot.

People at home talk of danger as though such a thing existed and were a concrete shape. They forget the exhilaration that carries one through and makes such a moment the fullest and most crowded that a man can

reach. Too many people are frightened by a word untested, granted on hearsay, known not at all or known vicariously. When it was over, I found that my gloves were off and my hands dead with cold. The little Smith and Wesson was piping hot, but going stiffly. Well, I would clean him in the morning. I reloaded and put him away. We were unharmed. The people in the wood had used slugs and small shot, — next day we picked a dozen specimens out of our rugs and furs; the heavier lead had all gone wide. Several times I have wondered whether we caught any of them. In those hot breathless moments we certainly did our best.

"But how came they to know of us?" I asked of George Brueggen when speech came back again.

"They know everything," he said; "how, I can't tell. Perhaps it's the servants, our man, or even yours; they're all mortally afraid. We kept our coming as secret as possible, but the insurgents know everything and every-body that moves along these roads."

"And why didn't they treat us as they treated your two friends and tackle us at close quarters?"

"They had no luck," he said, "or else they would have done. As long as we kept on firing and the horses were uninjured, they wouldn't risk their skins. If the horses had gone down, we might now be like him," and he pointed to the corpse that had no face. "If these fellows weren't afraid to die," he added, "there'd be no single German left in Russia—if they were like the Japanese, for instance."

We caught up the others, and presently a new fusilade put us on the alert. We listened. It was near, and we were going towards it.

"Forwards!" cried Fritz Brueggen; "it must be Karl."

"My brother and his friends," said George, beside me; and he spurred the old Lett on with words of warning. "We must have divided the band," he cried; "Karl will welcome them; he loves this sort of thing."

Our unexpected approach and assistance finished this second skirmish. A few more shots came from the unseen enemy in the woods, but we were a dozen now and made quite a formidable firing line.

"If the fellows would only come out," said the baron, as his brother presented me to him; "if they'd only come out! I'm sick of fighting in the dark."

Karl von der Brueggen, whose guests we were to be and whose castle was a refuge for the handful of noble families who held out bravely on that countryside, was a tall keen man, lithe and active as a greyhound, a born leader and one of whom any army might have been proud. It was his misfortune to be born in Russia.

The day was breaking as we made the castle. It was set on a hillside, and was a large squat house of pseudo-classic architecture, very similar to English country houses erected during the second half of the eighteenth century. Immense outbuildings were to the rear of it, and the whole was enclosed by a thick wall of good gray stone. The baron had not been content with this, for beyond the stone was a second circle of wire entanglements, and, further, every tree that might give cover to an attacking force had been cut down, and trunks and branches made a third circle that was far more difficult to break through than barbed wire. Without artillery, and in the face of a score of marksmen armed with magazine rifles, the place was practically impregnable.

Awaiting us was a garrison that could not but remind

one of Delhi and the Indian Mutiny. We were welcomed by Baroness Brueggen, by a dozen other ladies, and at least as many children. The servants had all gone over to the enemy. A countess prepared our breakfast; the baron's four sons served it; we were all most cheerful, republican, and democratic, although I believe that I was the only person present who bore no title.

Afterwards I made the rounds and was given a post of duty by my host. Below the hill and scarcely a mile away, beyond the broken telegraph-poles and the damaged railroad, lay the town of Tukkum, and it was there that the enemy was mustering in strength.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE next day, or the same day,—which you please,—the siege started. It began with a kind of deputation, some twenty men, who marched right up to our defences and called upon us to surrender. A mass of peasantry, several thousands strong, was at their heels, very similar in appearance to the band that had attacked the train on which I had set out from Dvinsk.

Baron Brueggen, brave to the point of indiscretion, went into the open and told the members of the deputation not to be fools. If they wanted a fight, he and his friends were ready for them. A bullet sang past his head. He did not flinch, but quite unmoved, continued the conversation. He pointed to the barbed wire and the lopped branches that made a thicket between him and the enemy. They could have war or peace, just as they liked, it was all one to him; but he would advise them to go home and stay home and guard their own houses against the Cossacks and dragoons. He turned on his heel; he had nothing more to say to them. As he moved, a dozen rifles were raised on our side of the strong gray wall. He signed to us to put them down, and careless, indomitable, strode back to where his wife and children were awaiting him. Not a man out of that huddled, dull gray throng ventured a second bullet.

There is no need to describe the five days of that siege,

and I have written of it elsewhere. The Letts valued their skins far too highly to risk a sudden assault and storm, or even, incredible as it may seem, to attack by day or night in any force. Perhaps they had agreed to starve us out, though I question whether they had a plan or general idea. I doubt even whether they quite knew what they wanted throughout this whole rebellion. They were a peculiarly fitful and unsatisfactory foe. Again, they must have feared the relieving party that was on its way to us, and whose advance guard on the sixth day created a diversion which is now historical in that particular province.

We shivered at our posts by night, we slept during the day with a weapon handy; the women were splendid and well worthy of their ancient names and titles. The Baroness Isa von der Recke was our cook, the Countess Elinor Pahlen her scullery maid, Baroness Nolde was chief of the housemaids, and all the children lent a hand and fetched and carried and cleaned up. It was really an anxious time, a chilly, draughty time, with the glass all shot away from the windows and a Russian winter outside. The children stood it best of all. For five days and nights there was never an absolute lull, and the strain was telling on most of us.

We expected relief, but when, we could not say. A Russian general would never hurry or put himself to inconvenience on our account. Early in the afternoon of the sixth day we heard the sound of rifle fire, of heavy rifle fire, ascending from Tukcum in the valley below. Around us, for the first time since the rebels had begun operations, all was still. Not a bullet came out of the park beyond the castle, not a Lett showed himself.

"It must be Mueller and his dragoons," said the baron; "the fool has led his men into the town."

"But Mueller has guns, and so far we have heard no guns," objected another.

All of them were agog to know the truth, and so was I.

Salit, my old Lett, pricked up his ears when I told him to get the sleigh ready.

"I'm going down to the town to see what's up," I said to my host, "if you'll excuse me."

"Business is business," laughed the baron; "with us here the worst is over or about to begin. If they succeed with the dragoons, they will think themselves invincible, and then they may really give us some trouble."

"I'll come back if they are coming back," I answered him.

I thanked my hostess for her hospitality. "You have waited on me yourself," said I; "never was guest more honoured. If ever you come to England, we will hardly be able to manage that, or even to give you a revolution."

I took leave of them all — we had become good friends during those quick days of isolation. The baron and Fritz and George saw me safely through the wire and entanglements. We passed the spot where we had buried Lamsdorff and Victor Roenne, a sheltered corner whose security had allowed us to soften the frozen ground with a huge bonfire and dig through half one night. Then downhill and alone to Tukkuum.

I had not been alone for a week. Always something of the child rises in one at such moments. One feels so very, very small, so helpless and insignificant; and the earth and its hazards seem so big, so overwhelming, and so powerful that, in the face of it all, one marvels at the miracle

of one's survival and persistence, and recognises the source of all religions.

The firing in the valley was nearer now, and my old Lett, usually so timid, seemed not at all afraid. We were understanding each other very well by this time, and I think he was for regarding me as mad, perhaps, but eminently methodical and safe. The idea that he might denounce me when we came among his friends never entered my head, and I feel surer still that it never entered his.

We were quickly in the town, and as the baron had surmised, there was a running fight going on between our erstwhile assailants and a party of dragoons.

Their leader, as the baron too had guessed, instead of avoiding Tukcum by making a detour, had led his men into a veritable death-trap, had exposed them in a long narrow street, capable of being blocked at both ends, every house of which had windows full of revolutionaries who poured their fire into man and beast.

Down here, and even before I had found my bearings, every one was far too busy to trouble about me or my sleigh. I had left it in Salit's care, and proceeding on foot, had turned into the town where the cut telegraph-wires hung limply from their poles. Chance brought me to the mouth of a narrow passage whence I could watch the last part of this fight.

The dragoons, scattered and out of hand, were galloping wildly up and down the empty street, bursting out into the open country where they could find a loophole of escape, or doubling back again as the cross-fire from the houses became too hot for them. Many lay dead or dying in the snow. One even charged past me, aiming a pardon-

ably savage wipe at my fur cap with his sabre, which I was fortunate enough to dodge. All the survivors of the main column were clear at last, and the insurgents now swarmed out of their houses and concentrated on a body of some thirty troopers who, at the commencement of affairs, had drifted into the courtyard of an inn and were holding the stables and outbuildings. The empty street had become alive with an excited population.

From every part of the inn a heavy fusilade was directed against these hapless troopers, and till their ammunition was spent, they answered nobly.

"Come out!" cried the Letts.

The dragoons fastened doors and windows.

Then men and women began to steal across the yard with bundles of straw and hay. These they lighted, piling them against the stables and the outbuildings. Children came staggering along under other bundles. It was burn or face the mob for the dragoons. Of the thirty, twelve escaped, sabring a path through the crowds that surrounded them; the rest were dragged from their horses and massacred.

It grew dark, but the burning buildings made a torch, and by this light I saw what I had never seen before and hope never to see again. There were many bodies in the hands of that mob, and the bodies were those of men bearing the hated imperial uniform. They were stripped, and women and children played with them. They used butcher's knives and instruments of steel. It was a ghastly business, and probably the suicide of the Baltic revolution. For later these mutilated bodies were photographed, and it was these pictures that the Tsar's soldiers had before their eyes when they came down in strength on

Courland and Livonia. For every life that was taken on that day the Tsar's men exacted a hundred.

Leaving this sickening spectacle, I found my old Lett, and, better still, I ran into the taciturn Russian who had led the attack on my train the day I travelled from Dvinsk with the four Germans. He recognised me and I him.

"My God, you have news to-day — this is the beginning of the end!" he said. "We wanted the army for ourselves, and this is the way we are treating them!"

"Does no one command here?"

"Letts," was his answer; "what can one do with Letts?"

"You showed them your pistol the day they wanted to drop the money and ammunition you had captured."

"I can't fight my own men and the enemy as well!" he cried; and then sadly, "I am leaving."

"For where?"

"Anywhere. I'll be taken here and shot if I stay. I don't mind that, if it would be of any use; but it's no use."

"Go to England," I said.

"As well there as anywhere."

"You'll really go?"

"Yes," he answered with a sigh, so deep and so despondent as to carry the very stuff and essence of despair.

"Is there any place where I can write."

"Of this?" he asked.

"Of this," said I.

"You will do so?"

"It's my duty. Your duty was to prevent it — I only write at your dictation."

"Come with me," he said, and I followed him.

He took me to the clubhouse of the Lettish Union, a stone and brick building, the only secular building of

any importance in that bleak penurious little town. He led me to a room fitted like a general's headquarters, with writing-tables and maps and ink and paper.

"I will be back before long," he said, and then went out.

Left to myself, I could not resist a more elaborate examination of this large bare room. I had evidently penetrated to the inner sanctum of the revolutionary organisation. How like a Russian it was to lead me there and leave me there!

I had sat down at the big table in the centre, shaping opening sentences, wondering how and where I would begin, when my eye, vaguely resting on a sheet of written paper, spelled out the signature at its foot. "**HC**-A-P-H-A-K," I read, and then "**HC**APHAK." Why, in Latin characters that was JARNAC!

CHAPTER XXVII

IN that deserted room I sat for two long hours and wrote. Nobody came in; nobody disturbed me. How I remember the steady glow of the lamps that we had lighted, the large map pinned against the wall, the broken cigarette ends on the unswept floor; and before me, always before me, like a goad, the outspread message in cypher and its flaming signature!

Her face, met sometimes in my dreams, gone this six years or more, was stirring, had risen in all its tenderness, and I could see it clear — just as to-day it looks out of the heavy silver frame close by this hand. I would write first and attend to De Jarnac afterwards, when I had grown cooler and could trust myself to speak or think of him.

Away in the street below I heard the sound of many voices, till I became absorbed and my story began to race across the paper.

The strange places that I have written in! Camps and crowded hotel smoke rooms; tables set on the high-road outside Mongolian taverns; queer resting-places, occupied for a single night and seen again only in one's memories; post-offices where you wonder whether the incomprehensible clerk will accept your incomprehensible telegram, or what will become of the envelope that holds matter obtained at risk of life and horse-flesh, — they all come thronging back on me as I sit here recalling the revolutionary headquarters at Tukkum.

It is easy enough to write if one is given the body and substance of one's messages; but it required something more than an effort on that day.

I told the story of our drive, the finding of Lamsdorff and Roenne, less fortunate than ourselves; of the ambuscade whose chief hero was my old Lett, the pitiful attempt at a siege, the stress and makeshifts of the garrison; of the fight with the soldiers at Tukcum, their dispersal and heavy losses; and, lastly, of the trapping of the thirty odd dragoons, how they had resisted, the firing of their place of refuge, their dash for liberty and partial massacre. I left some of the horrors that followed away. I knew that the government press agencies would do these justice and more than justice. And then I was able to turn again to the cypher message signed "Jarnac."

The Russian came back, arousing me from this bitter meditation.

I was ready for him with two envelopes.

He entered listlessly, broken, dejected, like a man who has staked everything and whose all has failed.

He dropped into a chair.

"I leave to-night," he said; "it has been arranged. To-morrow I shall be in Germany."

"And from Germany?"

"I go to London."

"You think you'll get through?" I asked.

"Oh, there's no difficulty in getting through," said he; "that is only a question of disguises and money."

"Will you do me a great service?"

"Of what nature?"

I gave him my two envelopes.

"Take this and this," I said. "Put the first one — I

have marked it — on the wires as soon as you get to wires. Here are seventy roubles, more than sufficient to pay the telegraph clerk. Deliver the second by hand. The London address is on it. Go in the evening — your first evening — and use my name. Take this card” — I gave it to him — “it will make you a friend if you have none. If you want money or direction or help, you have only to ask for them. I have explained all that in the letter.”

He hesitated, nervously fingering the two envelopes, the bank-notes, and the card.

“Have you said the worst about us?” was his answer.

“No, I have left that to the Petersburg agencies — they will not be behindhand.”

“What *did* you say?”

“My last words are: ‘As the evil, so the retribution; as the savagery of the oppressor, so the savagery of the oppressed.’”

He looked up sharply.

“You understand that?” he asked.

“It is in the natural order of things. It may pain us, but cannot be avoided.”

“And they who judge us in England will remember that?”

“I have done my best to make it clear.”

He rose to his feet.

“It is only the truth,” he cried; “no more than the truth! Our savagery is but an inheritance; it is the vengeance of the generations that have suffered; it is the inevitable tragedy that follows hard on crime. It is just payment, in their own base coin, of a thousand horrid debts. Our crimes are only the pale ghosts of other crimes perpetrated against us — and we have only pale ghosts

to pit against two centuries of murder! They have done worse than we; they are our masters; we did not learn lightly or willingly. We were patient; we were peaceable folk. My God, but we were patient! You have understood that; you have explained that?" he ended.

"It is all there," I said.

He thanked me and stowed the money and my two envelopes away in his pocket-book. It was through him that the first news of the Tukkuum fight and massacre reached London, beating the official agencies and their version by forty-eight hours.

I seemed to have won his confidence, as he had certainly won mine, for presently he said that he was waiting to see Arbusoff. He must see him before he could go on his journey.

"Who is Arbusoff?" I asked.


"Our leader here, the chief man in these provinces; he comes back this evening."

"Will you present me to him — as a friend?" I asked.

"I wish to," said the Russian.

We had not long to wait for this trusted leader.

Arbusoff, expensively dressed, tall, elegant, with costly furs and spotless linen, entered the headquarters of the Lettish Union like a king. No one would have discerned in him the formidable revolutionary. He was a man of presence, of education, of charm; supple, slim, with perfect manners and bearing. Yet tenacious! Under the well-brushed beard one divined a jaw and mouth equal to any strain; his cool blue eye looked through one and commanded respect, obedience. He was angry now, though his voice hardly rose above the pitch of ordinary conversation. The half-dozen Letts about him were



hearing some plain speaking on the subject of that afternoon's work. He was winding up a stinging criticism, very much like the umpiring general at the end of a day's manoeuvres.

"If you had treated those dragoons like men and not like wild beasts," he ended, "you'd have made a friend of every *mujik* in the battalion, and the story would have spread. You've ruined your chances with the army for nothing — for nothing! Now be off! I have work to do."

The discomfited Letts slunk out.

"Stay!" he said, calling them back and laying a sheet of paper on the table. "I have news from Petersburg. The Tsar is sending Orloff down here with twenty thousand men; Bezobrazoff goes to Dorpat and Reval with another twenty thousand. That will break up the railway strike. A new governor-general extraordinary is coming to Riga with orders to suppress this revolution at any cost. Tell your men of this and that they must go home. There is nothing to be done."

The Letts backed out, chattering among themselves. Arbusoff, the Russian, and I were alone.

The Russian came forward.

"This gentleman," he began, passing on my card, "is English —"

"I am charmed to meet you, sir." Arbusoff had interrupted him, addressing me in my own language and holding out a hand.

I took it.

"You are English, the correspondent of a Liberal newspaper," he pursued, "a very good newspaper and entirely on our side. You will pardon me if I am better informed

about you than you are about — shall we say myself? It is my business to know what is happening in these provinces, and a stranger is naturally the object of inquiries;" then, indicating the Russian, "Our friend here is going to London and you are using him as a messenger — do I guess right? He needs a change of air, and he has done his work. We have failed this time, in Moscow, in the Caucasus, and now here. What do you think of us — frankly?"

"Frankly," said I, "not much."

Arbusoff laughed.

"That is frankly," he said.

"You've poor material —"

"Opposed to similar material," he put in.

"That may be so. Theoretically it is, perhaps. But you forget the uniform."

"Well?"

"You should have marched on Petersburg by a dozen roads, by land and sea; instead of which you've been wasting all your strength and all your opportunities in stupid attacks on German castles."

"Like Schloss Durben?" said he. "I know all about you;" and he laughed again.

"Petersburg must bless Schloss Durben and all the other Schlosses you've been bleeding to death over. You've been playing their game —"

"And learning our own," said he. "Our next rising will be different."

"You believe that?" I asked.

"I believe in education," he answered, "and that is all we can hope for at present, and possibly for the next ten years." Then, with a consideration that I appre-

ciated, he offered me the paper that he had read aloud to the Letts. "Perhaps you would like to add this to your telegram," he suggested.

The paper was in cypher, and at the foot of it was the same signature that I had read on another message in that room.

"Pardon me," I said, "but I can only read the last word; and that is 'Jarnac,' evidently a name."

I spoke indifferently, carelessly, as though the two syllables I had just uttered were no concern of mine; yet for all that I watched him.

"Names mean nothing here," he said; "mine is not Arbusoff;" and continuing with the same pleasant suavity, "I was going to translate it for you," he added.

At his dictation I took down the same statement that he had made to the Letts; and for my further guidance he was good enough to continue: "All these appointments are made by the court. Of the three men not one is a statesman, or even a soldier. They are favourites of somebody in power, that is all. If they can say, 'Everything is quiet in the Baltic Provinces,' they will please their masters. Nobody will ask whether it is the quiet of death or whether it is a true pacification. It will be the quiet of death."

I added another sheet to my original telegram, and was about to return it to the Russian when Arbusoff, smiling at me, remarked: "Perhaps this also may interest you. Schloss Durben and your friends on the hill have been relieved. The general sent part of his men through the town in order to divert attention from the main body which made a long detour. He was particularly anxious to get through with his guns, and the trick has succeeded.

I should say that we may expect a bombardment at dawn to-morrow."

Another sheet was added to my telegram, and I put down a fifty-rouble note as well.

Truly a useful acquaintance for a special correspondent was this Arbusoff!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE Russian had departed; Arbusoff had departed. "We will meet again at Riga," were his last words; "you can be of service to me and I to you. As you see, I am practical — almost an Englishman!" And on that promise of a further meeting we shook hands.

Now I was in the street again with my old Lett.

It was impossible to drive back to the castle in the dark; I would very properly be shot by a sentry if I made the attempt, and apologies after such an accident are of little use to one.

I wanted a meal and comfortable quarters outside the town; not that I wished to shirk to-morrow's bombardment, but a few hours' quiet was a luxury I was willing to pay for at full market rates. I mentioned the matter to Salit.

"Step in, Mister," he said. He always called me "Mister." It was his one word of English and mighty proud he was to air it, regarding the simple prefix, I believe, as a title at least equal to Count or Baron.

I stepped in.

"*Byrrrh!*" he cried to the horses, and to me, "I know exactly such a place, where the Mister will be welcome. We will go to Professor Behrsing's, five versts from here; I used to work for the professor, and he will be glad to see me back again."

"Well, go ahead, Mister," said I, and Salit laughed. He was a friendly animal, stupid, affectionate, alarmed at trifles which he did not understand; very much like the old dog, in short, that keeps me company down here. Generations of slavery invariably tend to such a type.

Three miles or so beyond the town we came to what, in the darkness, appeared to be a villa with a veranda standing in well-timbered grounds.

Salit left his box and knocked at the front door. It opened, and I watched him explain matters to a middle-aged gentleman in a black suit. The professor, awkwardly rubbing his hands together, stepped on to the veranda. He begged me to come inside. He spoke in German and helped me out of my fur coat.

In England or in any ordinary place it would have seemed a strange thing to go inviting oneself at this hour of the evening, foisting oneself, really, on a Professor of Economics and Agriculture living in a lonely country house, and not exactly laying himself out for indiscriminate hospitality; yet here in Courland very little seemed strange, and I fancy that the one thing which might have filled me with uncontrollable astonishment would have been a written invitation to dine and sleep, and myself setting out with a suit case containing pajamas and the regulation swallowtails.

The professor, like most professors, scholars, and men of the study, was socially a trifle graceless, but, I think, once the ice was broken, quite honestly pleased to have me as his guest. He was an educated Lett, and, as Salit had prophesied, joined with his wife in giving me a most cordial welcome. Madame Behrsing, clearly the stronger vessel of the two, was a fiery little person whose political

ardour seemed to trouble her more cautious and hesitating husband. Without him as brake and ballast, I fancied her to belong to that heroic type which marks down some hated functionary and settles him with a bomb. The two, however, understood my need for quiet, and, as a correspondent, both were anxious that I should obtain a Lettish version of the different events, sieges, and happenings in which they, like all good Letts, had taken a part.

The professor's remedy for the whole question was not revolution but intensive agriculture. Addressing me as though I were a class of particularly dull, backward, and addle-headed schoolboys, — all his conversation was conducted on these lines, the professional manner, I believe, of most teachers and schoolmasters, — he explained his life's work and his personal contribution to the revolutionary programme. He lived on the land and made experiments with the land. He had already proved that by his method of farming the earth must yield fourfold; wherefore, if the Letts adopted this method, they would become so rich that without bloodshed or resort to arms, they would be enabled to oust the German landlords by the simple process of purchasing their farms outright. Then it would be their turn to play the capitalist. Thus they would obtain complete possession of the Baltic Provinces. It was all as simple as *a b c*. There was no necessity for any revolution, only for the economic one which he had outlined.

He led me through the house. Every room in it testified to the success of his experiments, and consequently to the correctness of his theories. The dining room was full of cereals that he had grown, maize, barley, oats, piled in great heaps on the floor; a lake of peas and beans was in

another room — one could sink to the waist in it; and farther on were wheat, clover, millet, roots, and new potatoes. It was a vegetarian's paradise. The whole villa was a barn, in which the professor and his wife were lodged with heaps of grain and other local products; with all manner of things, in brief, which the professor's labourers and intensive agriculture had coaxed from the fields outside.

Madame Behrsing humoured her philosophic husband, but I secretly felt that, in her inmost heart, she put a greater trust in the quick results obtained by high explosives and magazine pistols. She gave us an excellent supper, and afterwards made me up a comfortable bed on one of the sitting-room sofas. I said good night at last, closed my door, and was alone.

Ah, Joan, my Joan, if ever your dear eyes light on these pages, will I be forgiven? I confess to it. Where another might have sat up all that night probing the mystery of De Jarnac's reappearance or, at least, his signature, I calmly fell asleep!

I couldn't help it, Joan. For five nights I had watched with the Brueggens at Durben; to-day I had stood a fairly heavy strain; and now that I was alone and peaceful and at rest in a room with a sofa and bedding, I just dropped. Like a log, I tumbled between the covers, with hardly the force to fling my clothes upon the ground and say my prayers.

Daylight was peeping in through the shutters when I awoke, the thin sunshine of a winter's morning in the north. I opened my eyes and looked about me. In a corner of the room was a huge pile of peas — dried peas, of the kind boys shoot out of a pea-shooter. Then I remembered and burst out laughing. I was at Professor Behrsing's, three

or four miles beyond Tukkum, and in bed. He was going to liberate the country with dried peas. Something was running about upon the floor. I looked down and saw a large gray mouse taking his morning constitutional. To and fro he darted, and round the room. He was a cheerful little fellow and not at all alarmed to see me staring at him. Once he paused and had a look at me, then reassured, continued on his travels. I watched him curiously for quite a while, and whenever that waking returns to me, I always see a large gray mouse scampering about on a wooden floor and helping himself to peas.

The house must have been full of mice and even of rats, with so much provender lying loose in every room. I lay there watching the little beggar and thinking of Joan and De Jarnac and Arbusoff and that mysterious signature.

The theory of a coincidence I set aside. Even if it were! In any case I must find the man behind this borrowed name, and if he were not Joan's husband, *the* De Jarnac — well, life would probably continue and go on as it was going on now. But it was De Jarnac, *the* De Jarnac. Of that I was certain; why, I could not say. An instinct, a premonition? I was sure, as one is sure of things whose coming is marked out, is preordained, is necessary.

I am a believer in fate, if one may call that fate which grows out of long years of careful preparation. The hour may tarry, but when the will is there, its day arrives. It cannot be hurried or jostled or driven; it ripens, it matures. You are waiting, ready and fit for it; you recognise it, thrilled and yet calmly, hot and yet cold. You knew it must arrive. You are not taken unawares. Such an hour had struck in the big room of the Lettish Union at Tukkum.

To-day, as I pondered these things between the professor's blankets, I was wiser than five years ago. Then I had set up a hue and cry; then I had gone wildly to and fro blazing aloud my trouble; then I had rushed about Europe, much as the mouse was rushing about this room. I had hurried over to Paris, alarming everybody on my path; had swept across France like an angry bull, carrying De Jarnac's name to Avignon and Marseilles; I had given De Croisnel his opportunity in Petersburg, and, at the end, had collapsed like a burst balloon before Roy's summons. To-day I would sit at home, or, rather, go about my ordinary business as though no such person as De Jarnac existed in this world. This time De Jarnac would come to me. Five years ago I had been the hunter; this time I would wait.

There was my promise to Roy and to Joan's parents. I would not break it, nor should she suffer on my account again; but if De Jarnac came my way — and I was sure he would come — armed I would meet him, watchful, ready, and prepared.

These were the things I thought on that December morning as I lay snug and rested on the professor's sofa, with the large gray mouse playing hide-and-seek around me on the floor.

CHAPTER XXIX

RIGA was itself again on my return; that is to say, looking more or less like any ordinary city. Rather less than more, however. I had come back by rail with George Brueggen; somebody had given the word; the "general strike" was over. At Tukku I had parted with my old Lett — the fifteen-pounders had made a ruin of the room where I had interviewed Arbusoff; Salit and I had taken an affectionate farewell of one another, and now I was lodged once more on the third floor of the Hôtel de Rome.

Riga was a different place. Instead of simulating a perpetual Sunday, it had taken down its shutters, unbarred its doors, and was going about its business. Looking out of my windows on to the wide boulevard below, I could see the electric tramways running, cabs plying for hire, and boys and girls stepping gayly on their way to school. People went to and fro all day, and even the police dared show their heads again; those poor black Russian *gorodovoy*s that stand like crows at the street corners, and bow and scrape and beg, and kill and get killed as no other police in all the world. There they stood in twos and threes and fours, protected by a guard of infantrymen, and every now and then patrols came marching by to see that all was well.

We were under martial law; for the government had poured troops and quick-firing guns into the town and was no longer afraid. When you went out the soldiers searched

you for weapons, when you came in they did the same; good-humoured if you were good-humoured, patient, not very intelligent, they would pat you where they had patted five minutes before. If you declined to be searched, they had orders to shoot; and then they generally blazed away, smashing windows, hitting the wrong person, and making Riga quake and tremble till their prey had bolted and all trace of him was gone. What scurryings on these occasions; how we all crept into doorways till the bullets ceased!

This indiscriminate shooting, these alarms, might have their comic side; but less amusing was it to watch the gangs of prisoners being taken through the streets on their way to execution. Trial there was none in those days, and everybody knew that outside the town were the sand-dunes, — soft and easy stuff to dig a grave in, — and that thither the prisoners were being led to stand before a firing party and fill the shallow trenches in which the slain were piled.

One great fellow I remember vividly — shall I ever forget him? He wore the dazed and maddened look of a bullock as it goes before the butcher to the slaughter yard. His wild face was bruised and bleeding, for the Cossacks had thrashed him first; and now in their midst — how like a pack of hounds they were! — he was being led off to die.

Then I remember another group, — four young men in good clothes who went quite calmly. Under their soft black hats they wore the long lank hair of students, and their faces were very pale. The bitter cold had made them bury their hands in their pockets and press their chins into the collars of their top-coats. The oldest might have been twenty. I heard that when the soldiers ranged them

up before the trenches, these four young men struck up the Marseillaise, dropping with its triumph in their eyes. In England such lads are playing cricket and scoring off one another in debating clubs.

Every day it was the same, — men and women, women and men, being led off to the place of execution, and we all watching from the kerb. During the small hours of the night they would be driven forward in great herds, shepherded by horse and foot, the side streets barred with troops, the main street cleared. Roisterers saw this and grew sober. One gray afternoon I met three sleigh loads of important prisoners. I judged they were important because, as though in fear of an attempt at rescue, sleighs and escort went by at a gallop. Hanging on behind each sleigh, with arms outspread, was a black *gorodovoy*. Like some evil bird he hung there, with talons buried in the shoulders of his prisoners; and this black figure, fastened on his quarry, seemed to me something even more cruel and relentless than the dull-eyed Cossacks stooping on their mounts.

Riga looked on at all these things and then grew used to them; but behind the walls of the stricken houses from which these men and women had been taken, I often wondered what was passing and preparing.

Away in Western Europe, where stock-brokers and speculators have their own peculiar interpretation of events, Russians had advanced seven points; so quiet and calm and peaceful were we here again, so well was order being restored. It was a happy moment for the fortunate "bull." De Croisnel once more occurred to me in this connection, and I wondered whether he and his Ministry of Finance were profiting by the occasion.

As Arbusoff's message had foretold, a brand-new governor-general extraordinary ruled at the castle, auxiliary to and over the heads of the governors of all these provinces; and now on every wall one saw his Excellency's proclamations, in German, in Russian, and in Lettish. Often they were torn down over night, or altered, or disfigured. Under the veil of tranquillity and order that deceived the eye by day the revolution still smouldered. His Excellency was watching it, and several times a week Riga was told on pain of death to cease from this or that or t'other. Impossible demands, couched in impossible language by a stranger brought in from outside! Still, he must have drawn a good fat salary — I heard less fortunate officials discuss the figures with envy, even the allowances for wood and post-horses, the latter an item surviving from prerailroad days. Three hundred pounds a month was the report, with residence and perquisites, and power over life and death. His Excellency, they said, must nurse this job and make it last as long as possible.

Out-of-doors the shops were open; the fine shops of the Kalkstrasse and its affluents, the lesser ones in the mean streets where you drove warily with a pistol ready for hooligans and other bandits of the dark. Riga was no safe place these January nights. The active insurrectionaries had disappeared, the general strike was over; but enforced idleness had, in many instances, led to confirmed idleness; poverty and unemployment had followed on the exodus of the purchasing classes; unofficial tax-gathering had become a habit not easily laid aside; the winter was a hard one. Every day one heard of robberies, house-breakings, attempts and actual murder. To read the morning paper was to pass through column after

column of crime; and when you had done with this, you came upon an equal number of official arrests and executions.

One day I visited the chief of the police, a Baron Raden, whom revolutionary papers have accused of torturing to obtain confession and names of leaders and confederates. His officers were certainly not backward; Baron Raden, however, had tortured no one but himself.

He had been in the service for thirty years; six months from now he would be free to retire and draw a pension. He feared the revolution and his present risks; he feared the outrageous possibility that, after all these years, his life might be taken, and retirement, ease, his pension, everything, vanish in a bullet and a pistol flash. It was too awful to contemplate. So, far from torturing people, this old gentleman had locked and bolted himself indoors, sleeping by day and only venturing abroad by night. All that was possible he left to his subordinates. He was counting the weeks till his tenure of office would expire, till his release and personal escape. He must be out of danger now, and probably he has grown plump and round again. Then he was pale and thin and careworn and afraid, shrinking every day within his uniform, which bagged and hung all loose where he had filled it a few months before. "But here in the inner town one is safe," he reassured himself; "it is the suburbs that are dangerous, across the river, where I have no police." He wanted 2000 men, he told me, and had barely enough money to pay 300, and even many of these were soldiers he had dressed in policemen's clothes.

It must not be thought that we were entirely wretched. Certainly there was something rather tragical in much of our gayety. Many were merry because they were uncertain,

and many took copiously to the bottle as a handy means of allaying their ever present fears. One lived a great deal in the present and let to-morrow take care of itself. At the two music-halls were pretty faces, nimble feet; the champagne came in iced, closing time was 2 A.M.; and afterwards the American bar was open, and at a later hour still, one could drive on to Tritten's. Riga in those days was no place for the Puritan.

Socially, we did our best. The Germans gave their afternoons; sometimes one of them would venture on a dinner-party, with music to follow. The Russians, more careless and less threatened, had their evenings, that lasted till the small hours, and if one stood up to the flash and sparkle of Slavonic eyes, were not without a spice of danger all their own.

Perhaps the cheeriest of all places was the skating club. Its two lakes were in a park, and the club-house now served as a barracks for dragoons; while ready within an enclosure stood half a dozen quick firers. Here all the children of the town were to be found, boys and girls and little tots of three and four. The dragoons and they made friends; everybody was rosy and eager and excited with the sport. One forgot that such a thing as a revolution had ever been, and even the troopers and quick firers seemed there for our amusement. Once or twice, as we raced to and fro and circled and outside-edged, the alarm was given, and guns and troopers made ready and away. The children went on skating; the dragoons came back, and one or two were missing. There were the horses and the empty saddles and something covered on a sleigh.

Such was the general run of our life in Riga during the January of 1906.

CHAPTER XXX

My first meeting with his Excellency Count Bobroff, Governor-General Extraordinary of the Baltic Provinces, was timed for twelve o'clock of a February morning. There had been some delay about the granting of this interview, and, indeed, it had seemed as though my application were to be ignored. Then, of a sudden, an orderly turned up at the hotel, expressed his Excellency's regrets, and begged me to call upon the following noon.

I took a two-horse sleigh and drove luxuriously and proudly to the castle. I had put on evening clothes, as is the custom, and even my war medals and decorations. The hotel porters bowed profoundly as they saw me start; the *Fuhrmann* on his box said, "Please, Baron." For the first time during my stay at Riga I drove into the chief courtyard, past the two sentries, and stood in the main hall. This Baltic castle is an old German stronghold, with one face on a square and fronting the town; the back stands sheer above the ice-cold waters of the Dvina.

I gave my card and half a rouble to the *suisse*, and stood there haughtily inert while he stripped furs off me. As a general rule I am neither haughty nor inert, but, here in Russia, the more lordly and helpless your attitude, the greater importance attaches to you in the eyes of servants,—of the *suisse*, of his associates, of all those parasites that stand with outstretched palms before a great man's door. And without this display of silver and arrogance they lie to you and keep you waiting in the hall.

As the fellow took my wraps and galoshes, passing my card on to another and a cheaper minion, my eyes settled on his face. I steadied myself. "I have seen you before," rose to my lips, "and you said, '*Nyet.*'" Outwardly I was coldly silent; but here was the hairy savage that I had bowled over in the house near Avignon, the caretaker or watchman of the Château de Jarnac. Shaven and cleaned and brushed he was, in a dark blue livery with metal buttons and a silver badge; but there was no mistaking him. I have an eye for faces, and this one I would have recognised among a thousand. What was he doing here?

As I waited I could not help accosting him.

"You are part of his Excellency's household?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," said he.

"His Excellency brought you with him from Petersburg?"

"Yes, sir," said he.

"Petersburg is more amusing than Riga?"

"Yes, sir," said he.

In voice or face there was no sign or inkling that he knew of any previous meeting; that I who was speaking so easily to him in Russian was the same violent Englishman who had understood no word of his five years ago, and who had struck him as one strikes a dog. Well, I had changed since then, and after all, I had meant far less to him than he to me.

The second man came back and begged me to follow. Up the broad staircase we went and across the waxed parquet of an anteroom. It was filled with Lettish petitioners, and humbly they sat or stood. Then we came to a fine *salon* where his Excellency's chief secretary in uniform of blue and gold was waiting to receive me. A further room, and I was greeted by the Count Bobroff himself.

Like most high Russian officials, he was externally all graciousness: charming, easy in manner, fluent, and full of apologies for keeping me without a reply for such a while.

"I am a newcomer here," he said, "and have had no moment of liberty until to-day. Put yourself in my place. Messages, letters, telegrams, and that confounded telephone; two generals to direct — see here!" and he indicated the pile of papers on his writing-table.

I looked in the required direction. They were truly formidable. I took a step forward — first, most prominently displayed, was one of those two cypher messages signed Jarnac!

"This interests you?" he asked briefly.

"I have met it before — some weeks ago at Tuklum."

"Quite right," said he; "it came from there. I have just been looking through a heap of papers saved from the ruin of the Lettish Union, but, *nom d'un pipe*, they give no names! Only this one, Jarnac, and it is valueless. What do you think of it?"

He spoke so good an English, answered so well to Roy's description, — "the usual kind of foreigner, only more so," was the inadequate echo I had preserved of it, — was tall and handsome and perfectly turned out. In the undress uniform of a general he confronted me, little more than my own age, absurdly young to fill the post he occupied — Jarnac or no Jarnac, I could not but help feel that chance might now have answered all my prayers and at last brought me face to face with the man who had robbed me of my beloved Joan. And, moreover, there was my friend, the *suisse*, to be accounted for.

His Excellency had just asked what was, possibly, an

impertinent question; had put it to me purposely, maliciously, or so I fancied.

"Is not Jarnac a Russian name?" I answered him.

"There may be such," said he; "I have not met with any. Then, "You have come at a fortunate moment," he pursued; "I have just opened a copy of your journal."

He handed the newspaper across to me as he spoke. It contained one of my messages generously scored with blue; and the half column was, more or less, a somewhat caustic commentary on the state of Riga since his Excellency's arrival. I had not spared him nor his policy of suppression. With the newspaper was the original wrapper. It was easy to see how the thing had come into his possession. Some genius in the London offices, one of those bright young men I saw at desks and tables, — they look as though they were born at a desk and had never strayed from one, — eager to further the journal's circulation, had conceived the bright idea of sending a marked copy to every individual who was mentioned in its columns by name. Whether such mention was of a nature to further the recipient's or the contributor's interest had not occurred as a matter for careful consideration to this bright lad safe behind his desk.

"They have sent you this paper from London," said I, "in the hope that you may become a regular subscriber;" and I handed the copy back to him. It was a gratuitously unfortunate moment.

"You send these things," he pursued, "without waiting to take me into your confidence. It is possible that we who represent St. Petersburg may have good reason for our apparent harshness."

I bowed.



“IS NOT JARNAC A RUSSIAN NAME?”

"We are in a difficult position," he resumed; "our credit is being systematically undermined; we are the victims of terrorist outrages; Russia is not yet ripe for the impossible demands that the Socialists place before us. The character of our people is not suited to a parliamentary form of government; the Russian requires an entirely different treatment from the town-bred peoples of the West. If you would make this clear to your readers," said he, "you would not only be assisting to establish the truth, but you would also be placing myself and my government under an obligation for which there are possible equivalents. His Imperial Majesty the Tsar is not ungrateful."

It was delicately put, pleasantly and agreeably insinuated. I had heard of correspondents who took the rewards of such an acquiescence; and they did well on it, not only in money but in news, gaining access to many official sources denied to their more honest and inflexible colleagues.

"You wish to buy me?" I said at last.

"In Russia one buys everything and everybody. I am bought," he answered lightly; "do you think that I am here in Riga for my pleasure?"

"And your duty?" I asked.

"Is to my purchasers."

"And Russia?"

"Does any Russian care two pins for Russia? Those who have made that mistake are under lock and key or in Siberia. I have made you a very liberal and very gracious offer. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The Letts haven't a friend in Europe; you can hope for nothing from them. Your paper is influential. A mes-

sage from you well worded could at times make Russian stock advance one point, two points, or even three. You could leave here a rich man. I offer you this, and by the saints, but I am gracious!" he ended.

"I understand and admire your consideration," said I; "the thing, however, is impossible. I have never been bought or sold, nor do I buy and sell." Easy enough to such a man would have been the buying of my Joan — almost his second nature! Was it he; was *he* De Jarnac?

His Excellency had tried cajolery with me, reason, argument, or what he took for such. Now, like every Oriental, he chose another line, veering from argument to threats.

"I am absolute ruler here," said he, "as much an autocrat in these provinces as his Imperial Majesty is in Tsarskoe-Selo," and he smiled contemptuously. "I can have you expelled from here."

"Not without trouble from our Foreign Office, which, in the present condition of Russia, you will not risk," I interrupted him.

"In that case it would be easier and simpler were you to disappear — you know how one disappears in Riga?"

"Perfectly," said I; "the whole town since your Excellency's arrival is a model instance of the system."

"I have only to touch this bell," said he, "and you will never be seen alive again outside the castle."

"Your Excellency must have a holy terror of death, and evidently credits me with the same superstition."

He laughed at this retort, and with it his manner changed again. Now he was agreeable, insinuating, and polished as before.

"I was hardly serious," he said, "and, I am sure, you

were less so. I am unable to believe that a person so ready as yourself will not recognise the true nature of his interests. Come, you no longer refuse to place your paper at our disposal?"

"Not only do I decline to place it at your disposal," was my reply, "but in the future, if anything, it will spare you even less than it has spared you in the past. Even to-day's conversation," I ended, "may be presented to my readers."

"Take care," said he; and losing his self-control for one hot moment, "Take care," he cried; "you have already been turned out of Russia once before and by my orders!"

CHAPTER XXXI

MAY is come, and the gray in the blue of soft May mornings. The swallows have returned, and far away I hear the cuckoo calling. It was midwinter when I began this story, dark days, cold airs, a dank and sullen earth. To-day the blinds are up as I sit here, the lamps are only lighted in the evenings, and what was bare before is covered and heavy with young green. Now in the dark I hear the nightingale. Wonderful awakening of the year, magic with life, tragical with death! Of all new things now born, how many survive? There were seven known nests in my garden and half their unfledged broods are dead. Yet nature, so rich, so prodigal, can afford this seeming waste. Each year she creates the double of her needs to keep men humble. How little we are wanted, and our empty place how easily refilled!

Yet, as all things strike upward, aspiring to the sun, living their little hour of pure delight, paying for it with sorrow, how can I refrain from doing my lonely part in this new triumph of the senses? Virgin I seem to it all, wanting my mate; level with all glad things that pipe their love unblushing in the branches, filling the morning airs with song, whistling their wild good nights at sunset. So has her face, her presence, been a haunting, full of remembered kisses and the starry light of eyes dewed with May tenderness. In my blood has echoed the old knowledge, in my empty arms the tumult and stir and ever-

lasting burden of dear youth. Thus it was long ago, shall be again, and only death can make a coldness enter. I cannot change; ambition, wealth may call, but can their voice approach even her silence? Without her they mean raught, and with her less; for we have so few hours to live, so much to overtake — all these dim years of parting where I now am placed, testing the brazen mask, weighing the ultimate words of his Excellency Count Bobroff.

There had been a flaw in the mask; for one fierce, naked moment he had allowed me to pierce it and know that I was in the presence of an enemy; to know also that it was he who, informed by De Croisnel, had ordered my arrest and sent me packing across the Russian frontier in the spring of 1901. Therefore, he was not the Count de Jarnac, not the man who, known to me only by that borrowed name and title, had bought Joan Garioch, making her his wife when I was absent and far from English ground. De Jarnac had been either in Paris or on the way to Paris when I was in St. Petersburg and could have given no orders. This man had acted in his stead.

Such was my reasoning, and little time I took over it, as we sat facing one another across his Excellency's writing-table. He must know everything, it seemed to me. Perhaps a time might come when he would speak.

"I have been turned out of Russia once before; your Excellency is perfectly right," I had replied; "till to-day, however, I had no knowledge that it was by your Excellency's orders."

The governor-general extraordinary of the Baltic Provinces examined his carefully polished finger-nails. Evidently he was waiting for me to show a deeper interest in the savage admission just forced from him. Human

nature demanded it; at whose instance had he given these orders, I ought to have asked. There were a dozen questions that should have followed on his statement.

His Excellency lit a cigarette, giving me full occupancy of the stage, determined apparently that I was equal to my opportunity, must so interpret it and in no other way.

Instead, as I had agreed with myself in that long hour when I had lain awake on the Lettish professor's sofa, watching the large gray mouse race to and fro over the floor, my part was silence; was to let things take their slow inevitable course until De Jarnac came to me, as come he must. I was not going to him. I was no longer the hunter intent upon his prey, hot in pursuit; that old folly and bungling was ended. Rather was I passive, fatalist, and sure, convinced that in its own good time all that I sought would be revealed, and I free to strike or to be stricken. Then I must act, not now. Most certainly I was no easy instrument ready to answer the playing of any Count Bobroff. His Excellency had expected a different face than the one that I had turned on him.

"You are not curious," he said at last; and then, "In five years one may change."

So he knew everything — but would he speak?

"Women are more constant," he pursued.

It was a peculiar remark, provocative perhaps, or the end of a train of thought. I had it! Me he regarded as one who had probably outgrown an early love, while Joan — my Joan! — held steadfast. It was the first word I had had of her, of her brave spirit and her faith, since I had opened that last letter in the cab after my call in Portland Place. It was the first real news I had had of her since my return to London from South Africa, since the morning

I had turned out of the Langham, keen, expectant, a little tremulous, thinking to see her, hear her once again; instead, to meet that emptiness, that tragical reception in Sir Alison's library. I could have thanked Bobroff. Joan had not changed, was what I read into his "women are more constant."

He saw me colour and kindle at the stroke. "You are not curious?" he said again.

"On what subject?" I asked.

He left me without an answer and touched a bell. The blue-and-gold secretary came in to us.

"I will see no one else this morning," said his Excellency; "the Letts who came yesterday are here; they can come again to-morrow. I have no time to attend to them to-day."

"Orloff has telephoned about some Lettish prisoners," said the secretary, "and is waiting."

"Put him through to me."

The secretary retired.

Bobroff picked up the instrument on his desk with an "Excuse me"; and in a few moments Orloff, the general commanding in Livonia, had reached him.

"They are to be shot," said his Excellency; "without trial," he added; "we do not want to be bothered with trials. Korff has given his word of honour that the six men who surrendered to him should not be executed? They surrendered to him on that condition? We are not responsible for the honour of Baron Korff," said his Excellency. "All well?" he asked. There was an exchange of compliments, and the conversation ended.

It was interesting to be a witness to the actual working of the pacification — so they called it — of these wretched

provinces; and as to the Baron Korff who had given his word of honour so promiscuously, little notice was taken of his pledge. He was a captain in the Tsar's army and took this episode so much to heart that when his prisoners were led out to execution, he blew his brains out as a protest, letting the poor devils know that he was not to blame. His honour was intact. This incident created some small stir at the time and was spoken of for several days.

The Count Bobroff had finished his day's work.

Should I take my departure? Honestly I felt inclined to stay; but our official business was over, and more than over, and he had given me matter enough to fill a healthy column of my paper. Involuntarily, perhaps, for the most part; a special correspondent, however, thrives on these chance moments, building a character from a flash or two, a series of opinions from the single one that makes the others logical. I rose to make my bow.

"We have hardly talked," said his Excellency; "why not stop and share my *déjeuner*? I am expecting a couple of friends; but you who meet so few Russians in these German provinces should welcome this opportunity. We have hardly touched upon politics; I have, perhaps, need of your advice; you will do me the honour?"

He was all graciousness again, and I was hungry, not only in body but in spirit; was, indeed, loath to part from this man who could minister to both appetites.

I thanked him and accepted.

This time it was he who led me through the great *salon* with the glass chandeliers and Empire chairs against the wall; through the square anteroom with its bad portraits of by-gone Tsars, where the Lettish petitioners had waited to-day and yesterday, and would probably wait to-morrow,

and the day after, and next week. Everybody had gone. Downstairs we went to his Excellency's private suite, catching a back view of the hairy savage now so elegantly transformed into a *suisse*.

Count Bobroff called him to us.

"Do you recognise this gentleman?" he asked in Russian.

Alexandre, late of Avignon, looked me over stupidly, then came out with his ancient monosyllable, "*Nyet*."

This echo and its strange associations made me smile.

"You are sure?" said his Excellency, joining in my smile.

"*Nyet*," returned Alexandre, and we passed on.

"You are certainly not curious," said Count Bobroff.

"Need one show it?" I asked.

"In Russia, as in America and most free countries," he replied, "one's advancement depends upon a show of zeal. And frequently," he added, "you have to show it so much at the top of your voice that even a deaf man must observe you. It is thus that one makes a career. Ah, here we are," and here he paused to present me to those two other guests whose presence he had mentioned as an additional and, perhaps, educational inducement for a prolongation of my visit.

CHAPTER XXXII

THEY were expecting us, not only their host but also myself. The table was laid for four, and it seemed to have been understood in advance that I was to make one of the party. I admit that I was astonished when Count Bobroff made his presentations. The tall man with the mustache was his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch, a distant cousin of the Tsar; the other was hardly less distinguished, being Serge Patiomkin, Prince of the Tauride. Both men were directly descended from Catherine II, the Romanoff, perhaps through her husband, Patiomkin, through that all-powerful ancestor who was first of all her lover and later on her minister.

Rumour, outside Russia as well as within, had for several years been busy with both names. The Grand Duke, it was said, courted a similar popularity to that enjoyed by the Orleans prince who had taken the people's side at the outset of the French Revolution. He was an avowed democrat and constitutionalist. A stronger Tsar would have had him thrown into prison. Prince Patiomkin, it was whispered, might end his days as emperor of all the Russians. The extermination of the Romanoff dynasty must, however, precede his succession. It was a not unlikely event, said some, and the Prince of the Tauride might even be counted on to assist in this *dénouement*.

The two men were doubly interesting. Should the revolution ever reach a definite end, it was obvious that the

Grand Duke would make a strong effort to ascend the throne, elbowing out his less popular relatives; while once the Romanoffs were driven from Russia, Patiomkin would have the nearest claim. Though possible rivals, the two appeared to be the best of friends. The struggle was still far off, and Nicholas and his family still safe behind the guards of Peterhof or Tsarskoe-Solo.

"You had not expected such company at my modest table," said Bobroff, his introductions over; "Prince Patiomkin has an estate near here, and his Imperial Highness was visiting the prince in spite of those disorders of which we hear so much and see so very little."

Patiomkin was a gracious prince.

"See here, Bobroff," he interrupted, "I want all my peasants to be let off. Orloff has caught several of them. They are accused of dancing on a portrait of his Majesty Nicholas II, of carrying weapons, and trying to burn my roof down over my head. They are children. I shall have them thrashed, but no shooting, if you please. I have known them since I was a child, and the estate would look uncomfortable without them. Besides, I hate new faces."

"Your Highness has only to command," said his Excellency; "Nikitin must telephone through to Orloff at once."

The blue-and-gold secretary was sent for and given instructions.

"Patiomkin means to retain his popularity even if they burn him in his bed," observed the Grand Duke.

The prince smiled.

"In England," he said, addressing me, "one is kind to dogs and horses and women and children. In Russia one adds peasants to the list. Tolstoi says that without

them we would starve, and probably he is right. They are certainly more useful than stock-brokers."

We were at our third glass of vodka, — the Russian needs some stimulant to waken him at noon, — and the *zakuska* were circulating. *Zakuska* are *hors d'œuvres*, only more so, and run from pickled mushrooms to lobsters and mayonnaise. One can, in case of necessity, make a meal off them alone.

"*Blinis*," said Bobroff, "the first this year; they are new to you?" he asked, helping me to a circular kind of pancake and lots of cream and caviare.

Blinis were new to me and very excellent.

"In Moscow," said the Grand Duke, "where are most of our millionaire merchants, it is no uncommon thing for them to die of *blinis*. It is their passion, and as other men die of drink, these Moscow merchants die of over-eating."

"You have never been to Moscow?" asked Patiomkin.

"Not as yet," said I.

"And Petersburg?" asked the Grand Duke. Was it fancy, or was there actually a wicked smile behind his eyes?

"I have seen Petersburg," I answered.

"No more than that?" from Patiomkin. He too seemed well informed upon the subject.

"I was only there a couple of days," I added unabashed.

"Our friend here asked too many questions," remarked the count.

"Ah, Russia is an inconvenient country; it has its advantages, but it is most decidedly an inconvenient country," observed the Grand Duke.

"Convenient," said I, "if one happen to have authority."

The Russians smiled.

Prince Patiomkin told the story of a friend. "He had an uninteresting wife," said the prince, "so he took her abroad — to Monte Carlo, I think, or was it Homburg? In any case he took her abroad and returned to Petersburg without her. When she tried to follow, she was stopped at the frontier. He had given instructions, and at every station it was the same. She had to stay outside, and he was rid of her. You see, gentlemen, Russia has its advantages," concluded the prince, "whatever our friends, the revolutionaries, may say to the contrary; or whatever you English correspondents may write in your newspapers."

Somehow the conversation, take what turn it might, always came round to me. There were moments, indeed, when I felt as a mouse must feel with three large cats all at it. Nothing had been said, apparently we were a friendly and convivial party, yet all the time I knew that behind the bland masks that these three Russians turned upon me was a knowledge of things so personal and near that their open discussion would have sent my clenched fist into the face of any one of them.

We left the table at last and went through a large and elegant *salon* into a smoke room furnished with Eastern rugs and divans. It was a remote place, far away from the bustle of the official quarters of the castle, and the windows stood sheer above the icy waters of the Dvina.

Patiomkin looked out. "That makes me freeze," he said in French. "I prefer the Neva, which is at least solid."

Bobroff had the curtains drawn and the electric lights switched on, though it was still broad day.

It was he who now took charge of us.

Turning directly to me, "This party was arranged," he began; "it was arranged between his Imperial Highness,

his Highness Prince Patiomkin, and myself. You asked permission to call upon me several weeks ago; your letter remained unanswered till it occurred to one of these gentlemen that you might be of some use to us."

"Will your Excellency continue?" said I.

"There are certain private matters into which we will not enter," he resumed; "they concern a lady in whom one of us has an interest. Five years ago it would have been an easy matter for my lieutenants to have caused your disappearance. You understand me?"

"Perfectly," I answered.

"This time," said Bobroff, "we will be less merciful."

"His Excellency has made himself quite clear?" asked the Grand Duke.

"Not entirely," said I, "for I fail to see how any measures you may take against myself can cover the point of my being of use to you. His Excellency mentioned some such function."

"We are coming to that," observed Prince Patiomkin.

Bobroff continued.

"In my office this morning I suggested that you should place your paper at our disposal. I offered money, rewards, a fair exchange. Now I offer nothing. You can choose between that and the Dvina."

"I do not envy you," murmured the Grand Duke, and to Patiomkin he added, "Bobroff would make an excellent minister."

"He is a second Patiomkin," answered the descendant of that great man.

"You will be tied up in a sack full of lead and dropped into the river," continued Bobroff. "Had you been a private individual, we would not have offered you an alter-

native. In that case you would have been put out of the way without much fuss; you have earned the displeasure of a personage whom it is dangerous to displease. But as a correspondent, you may win your release, for even now you are our prisoner. You doubt it?"

"I do not doubt it," said I; "I doubt nothing, — no villany, no baseness, and no corruption — have I not already sufficient evidence that there is no step so vile that one of you would not stoop to it?"

I looked at Patiomkin and at his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch. Both were unconcerned, bland, superior to any insult I could hurl at them. Of these three men, one had robbed me of my Joan; I was in the enemy's house at last, and I had all but closed with him.

"We give you," said Bobroff, "one hour in which to make up your mind. Now we will leave you; the ladies are awaiting us. You can choose between the Dvina and the surrender of your journal;" and with that the three of them left me, going out towards the great *salon*.

A moment later I followed them.

Instead of open doors and loose portières I ran into a dozen bayonets.

I was trapped.

I returned to the smoke room and tried its doors. They were locked. I was at the end of a blind alley, and outside the windows through which I might escape ran the ice-cold waters of the Dvina.

It was no good worrying. I had still an hour to go. I made myself comfortable on a divan and lit one of his Excellency's cigarettes.

Bobroff was not De Jarnac; he was the tool, the jackal

of these others; to them he owed his position, even, probably, his present appointment as governor-general extraordinary of the Baltic Provinces. They were the men; Patiomkin who ranked only second to a member of the imperial family, Paul Ivanitch of the blood royal itself. Which of these two was it?

Again, as I sat there, I heard Bobroff's words, "Women are more constant"; and again they aroused in me a joy, an elation that made all my present danger seem as naught. Joan was constant; probably Joan was not far off; even might be one of those very same "ladies" of whom Bobroff had spoken a moment since.

The plot and entanglement now enmeshing me was very clear. These men desired my death, but greater than their hatred of me was their greed. I must make money for them or die, was the meaning of Bobroff's two alternatives.

At the end of an hour I crossed the *salon* again and was met by the bayonets of the dozen infantrymen drawn up there. The blue-and-gold secretary was with them now.

"If you will sign this telegram," he said in French, "my orders are that you shall be released."

I looked at the blue telegraph-forms which he had passed across to me. They contained a long message addressed to my newspaper in London.

"Why not put my name to it yourself?" I asked; "nobody will know."

"That might succeed twice," he answered calmly; "no, it is too dangerous. You will sign — or else —" and he motioned to the row of infantrymen.

"I will not sign," said I; and added, "Monsieur Nikitin, I believe the hour is up."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE hour was up.

Two men in plain clothes, following the secretary's directions, came towards me with cords and a gag.

"I am sorry," said the secretary; "I am only carrying out the instructions of my chief. I trust that you will spare me the necessity of enforcing my commands;" and he indicated his little pack of soldiers.

I held out my hands and submitted. A struggle would have been useless and far more dangerous, it seemed to me, than all his Excellency's threats.

"Follow us," said the secretary.

I went along with them.

Monsieur Nikitin, taking a key from his pocket, led the way. Again I crossed the parquet of the *salon* and entered the Oriental smoke room. The secretary unlocked one of its doors. We were in a damp stone passage. He unlocked a second door. My jailers produced more cord and bound my ankles, and again another length that they fastened round my knees. They gave me a shove, and I was on the floor of a dark cell whose one grated window, high overhead, was open to the cold outside. It was a dismal place, hard and moist and bare, and here they left me. I heard the click of the lock, the second click as the key went round again; then I lay helpless.

Hand and foot I was bound, with a gag fast in my mouth, the celebrated Russian *nyemets*, which signifies "the dumb."

I was biting on it. They might have put me into a chair, I thought; or they might, at least, have let me have my fur overcoat, still, no doubt, in the care of Alexandre, the savage I recalled so well from Avignon. In thin evening clothes it was no joke shivering in that chill and dampness, and had not Bobroff given us such an excellent luncheon, I would certainly have caught my death of cold.

There were moments wherein I was supremely downcast — it is best not to dwell upon them. There were other moments in which the knowledge that my Joan was still alive and loyal to me atoned for all the misery of the hour and made even my present discomfort seem a small and trifling price to pay for what I had read into Bobroff's admission. Such it had seemed to me, though little of an admission it might be, falling on ears less sensitive and strained. What the heart hopes it finds, twisting the blakest words to suit its needs, making gold from lead and pearls from pebbles; even from the very stones that are aimed to do it hurt.

How long I lay in that dark place, I do not know. The daylight left the small grating, there was the blue of twilight, and then a star. I thought of many things: of Bobroff who was not De Jarnac, because he had ordered my expulsion from Russia while De Jarnac was either in Paris or on the way to Paris; of the Grand Duke Paul Ivanitch, who might be De Jarnac, and who, like Patiomin and the count, spoke English well enough to be the man who had married Joan. Each one of these three might be he for whom I was waiting, even Bobroff; for it was possible, though I thought, improbable, that he had given no orders, that his outburst was a clever piece of acting, one of those theatrical and melodramatic lies at which the

Russian official or diplomat is so adept. As to my expulsion, either Patiomkin or the Grand Duke would have found it the easiest matter in the world; in Russia such men have only to express a desire and their wish is accomplished. Bobroff, too, in favour with these powerful allies, could count on their support and would enjoy the same privileges. It was, indeed, difficult to discover which was the man.

These reflections kept me company as I lay and shivered. The star beyond the grating disappeared; it must have been nine or ten o'clock when I heard footsteps that stopped short outside my door. I was to have visitors, or perhaps some supper.

The light of a lantern blinded me at first, and then I made out Alexandre carrying my hat and overcoat. He knew me now, recognising me with something like a grin, but bearing me no ill-will, apparently, for the emphatic manner in which I had treated him on the occasion of our first encounter. Behind him were the Grand Duke Paul, the Prince of the Tauride, and Count Bobroff, in gala uniforms, blazing with stars, crosses, and decorations.

"It is better like this," said the prince, speaking in French.

"I think so, too," agreed the Grand Duke.

"We have come to say farewell," observed Bobroff.

"No *au revoir* this time," said the prince.

"We have brought your hat, galoshes, and overcoat, so that you may take a walk," the Grand Duke added with a smile.

"You know those famous processions that you describe so eloquently in your newspaper, eh?" asked Patiomkin.

"That go through the streets of Riga in the small hours of the morning?" asked another.

"To the sand-dunes and the trenches?" added a third.

"A ring of Cossacks all round them, and, at last, the firing party that shoots so badly and only hits at the fourth or fifth attempt, as you so correctly stated in your journal?" from Bobroff.

"You know those processions, eh?" repeated Patiomkin.

"You will join to-night's," said Bobroff. "Adieu!"

The door was locked on me again. I must wait there four, five hours more, and then the Cossacks would come, and that sad tramping through the snow. I rolled along the floor, and somehow managed to roll into my furs. They made a kind of bed, and I was warmer now.

My three enemies, Bobroff, the prince, and the Grand Duke, had been in their finest uniforms; evidently some big reception was to be held at the castle to-night, no doubt in honour of such august visitors.

Another hour passed and a smaller star came to the iron grating and looked in. Far away I heard the sound of sleigh-bells and then a movement as of distant comings and goings. But a narrow passage separated me from the smoke room and the large *salon*. The guests were arriving. There was certainly a big party on to-night, and his Excellency was receiving in his own private suite.

By and by I heard music, the sound of violins far away and of a piano. They must be dancing; for now it was a polonaise, then a waltz, then a mazurka, and a waltz again. The dancing ceased. Somebody was playing the violin, and when it was over, I heard murmurs of applause, faintly, yet near enough to recognise the sound.

The buzz of distant conversation followed, and from the smoke room across the passage, the men's voices reached me quite distinctly; even an aroma of cigarettes came float-

ing through the crevices to where I lay. Once I heard a peal of silvery laughter, the light laugh of a woman, complimented by royalty, perhaps, and radiant in her most dazzling toilette. Maybe it was Madame Daragan or Madame Boguslavsky, one of those charming Slavonic women whose acquaintance I had made while visiting among the Russian coterie; or perhaps it was Miss Scherbayeff or the Princess Ourousoff. It would be an event for them to meet the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch or Serge Patiomkin, Prince of the Tauride. It had certainly been an event for me, I reflected grimly, pressing into my furs and very cold about the nose.

The music began once more, and this time, judging by the abrupt stops and the varieties of time and tune, they were dancing a cotillion. After that came a tenor; it was Schwarz from the local theatre, the best singer they had there; only last night I had been listening to him in "Tannhäuser."

Across the passage, in the smoke room, men were playing cards; I heard the movement of the tables and then one joyful voice cry "*Sans-â-tout*," and "I redouble." He must have held a "grand slam" hand to shout so loudly. They were obviously at Siberian whist, which is to bridge as bridge is to ordinary whist.

Thus parasitically and at second hand I joined in his Excellency's evening, following, as blind men follow such things, the movements and occupations of the guests I pictured in the *salon* and the room that led to it, in the other room where we had lunched, and in the room across the passage where we had smoked.

The cold of my prison increased, I grew hungry and thirsty. Sometimes I found myself wondering whether all

this was not some bizarre and tangled dream from which I must presently awake. That I was really going to be roused and hurried into my hat and overcoat, and then be led away to join one of those gangs of Lettish prisoners that were driven and herded during the small hours of the morning, was difficult to believe. But what was to prevent this? There was no risk of discovery; were I to disappear, no one whose business it was to make inquiries about me would go poking and digging about in the sand-dunes where the revolutionaries fell each day into their shallow graves. At the castle, should our consul trace me so far, what would happen? At the most they would say that I had called in the morning, taken my leave, and gone about my affairs.

I could hear Bobroff accounting for me in his most plausible manner. "Riga," he would say, "is none too safe a place, especially after dark. Everything is possible; my police do their best, but sometimes even their vigilance is insufficient. A very charming gentleman," he would end; "he called to see me only the other morning."

Bobroff would be full of sympathy and deep concern; and in all probability our consul was his guest at this very moment, pleasantly occupied, pardonably untroubled, little dreaming that within perhaps fifty feet of him was a British subject bound and gagged and ready for the butcher and the sand-dunes that would tell no tales.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THAN to think what I was thinking pleasanter far it was to follow his Excellency's dance and entertainment; and really, in a manner, I was grateful to him for providing me with this distraction, which every now and then would make me break away and listen and guess and wonder what was going forward.

I recognised the dancing of another mazurka, the soft strains of a waltz; and then I heard my Joan — her voice, distant and very far, but hers — I could not be mistaken!

With an effort I sat up, listening as well as I was able; the cold, the darkness, and the damp of my stone cell were all forgotten.

There is a quality in her voice, something of boyishness, something Amazonian, more properly; no other voice that I have ever heard possesses quite the same tone and timbre, and it is difficult to describe. It had not changed, save in the power and volume, as though in the seven years since last she had sung to me the girl had grown into a woman. I think the tears rolled down my cheeks as I sat there and listened.

Two simple English things she gave them, — names do not matter, and she for whom I am writing will recall that night, — and when they had done applauding, she finished with "Home, Sweet Home." It was bold of her, and only a superb self-confidence could have enabled her to win them

with so plain an air. I had listened breathless, covetous for each sad note, fearing the end. It came, and I heard her praised anew. I waited long — to me it seemed like so many hours; she did not sing again.

Wine can give one a soft cheerfulness in which the world seems good and life all rosy and filled with easy tasks. Something of that feeling was now with me, having heard her, knowing that under the same roof as myself she moved. Even though the walls between us were of stone, the gulf between us critical, I sat there, bound and gagged as I was, feeling my furs a nest of roses and Bobroff's prison a lover's bower. Joan too was in Riga, — here in this very castle! If red revolution might have given her to me and I armed outside, I could have led a storming party on that night which would have scattered the few sentries and the guard-room files, flung Bobroff and his friends into the Dvina, cleared room and room of that strong house, and fired and razed it like a second Bastille, leaving her scatheless and my one reward!

Though I listened and kept my position close to the door, no more singing of Joan's did I hear. A black mood settled on me in the end. Had he whom I called De Jarnac, knowing I was there and within ear-shot, willed to torture me thus, I asked? It would have been a fiendish device, worthy of Bobroff or either of his royal friends, thus to abuse her innocence, making her the instrument of their last infliction, driving her all unknowing to sing me to my death.

I listened and at last came silence. The guests were departing, had all departed. No sound now came from the castle; only, beyond the iron grating, I could hear the murmur of the river and the sighing of the wind.

Was I forgotten, passed out of my captor's mind to be recalled next morning; or was there no procession of prisoners on that night? I dozed and fell asleep.

I must have slept lightly, for I sprung to wakefulness as the steady tramp, tramp of soldiers broke the silence. They were marching in this direction, towards my cell and over the echoing stone. Had they come for me at last?

A short sharp "*Stoi!*" and they halted, bringing their arms to ground with a rattle.

The key turned in my prison door, once, twice. Though I could hear it open, the darkness was as great as before. A man was stooping over me. "Do not speak," he said in English; "a sound and you are lost."

He removed the gag, and I obeyed him. He cut the cords that bound me and helped me to my feet. Hat, coat, and galoshes, he had these. "You will want the galoshes," he whispered; "they will deaden your tread. Now follow."

He had me by the hand, and in the darkness he led me to the far end of the cell. "Take care, there are three steps here," he whispered.

I went down the three steps. He passed his fingers over the wall as though seeking something. The wall opened, and we were in another passage. "I leave the rest to you," he said; "you are in the apartment of Monsieur Nikitin; unbolt the door and find your way into the street."

He turned away and left me standing there. He had been a shadow, a ghost, with a voice that spoke English. Before he disappeared I recognised the glitter of several orders on his breast, and that was all I knew of him, except that, for some reason which I could not fathom, he had cut my bonds, released me, pressed the spring of a secret

even recognised me through the glass, crying, "That is he!" and raising an infernal din generally.

They pulled at the bell, they banged on the door with their rifles; it was no good waiting. Presently I heard footsteps and voices within; the whole household, Nikitin, his wife, and all the servants, would be aroused.

I went back through the *salon* to the library, past Mimik's room, and to the passage into which I had first stumbled after my mysterious liberation.

Now the front door was being unfastened. I could hear it all quite plainly. There was a sound of parleying and voices. Denials and astonishment and a ridiculing of the idea that I could be there, from within; "But, your Excellency, we have seen him with our own eyes," from without.

What was I to do? They had been admitted. The pack of them and their weapons were rattling through the hall. I went from room to room desperately. It was like playing a game of hide-and-seek. Luckily, every room was on the road to every other room and connected by doors. I might go round this circle for a few moments, keeping always a room or two ahead, but they would post men in the hall or at some point which I must pass, and then they would have me and take me back to that bleak lodging from which I had escaped.

I could conceive no other end to this situation, except, perhaps, the delay occasioned by an ignominious hiding, or a forlorn hope which might carry me through them and into the street outside.

A voice came to me from the hall.

"Fasten and bolt the door again," it said; "we will search the apartment."

CHAPTER XXXV

THEY had fastened and bolted the front door again; so there was no escape for me that way. I might hide, and so prolong the agony; but I had reckoned without Mimik's nurse.

This female, a regular old Cossack in a night-dress, had come upon me and set up a shout. I floored her, as gently as the circumstances would permit, with a bolster and took to my heels again. Two rooms from there I saw the river Dvina flowing icily beyond the double windows of a day nursery full of the children's toys. It was my last chance.

The nurse had recovered and was leading the way. As I flung off my furs, my swallow-tails, and galoshes, threw open the windows and mounted to the sill, she had brought the soldiers up to me, leaving just the bare moment where I could take a header and be quit of Bobroff and his castle and all his minions, satellites, and friends.

The cold of that plunge! But I had the stream with me, and if I kept to it, I knew I would pass the custom-house and the two torpedo-boats that had been sent down to winter there; and then with luck I might reach one of the foreign vessels loading or unloading against the quays.

Ice-floes went with me; I dodged them and dived them and was hit by them. They were more dangerous than the bullets that went after me; for my pursuers were firing from the castle windows, and if I were target, making

very bad practice. They kept it up for a while, occasionally pitting the water, once splashing my face as a shot landed a foot in front of me. Perhaps they didn't try too hard. The alarm had gone forward to the men on the torpedo-boats, and these good fellows didn't try at all. A few of them cheered me even; for the navy was three parts mutinous, and they probably took me for a revolutionary who had broken away from the castle dungeons and was making a desperate effort to escape by water.

Now I could see the ships against the quays, but the cold was telling on me and they seemed far away; and then in one glad moment the blur and faintness passed, for I had seen the flag of England, our Jack, free, unfurled, upon the nearest vessel, but a few strokes away — only a few more strokes! Never had I espied that worn old rag with a greater catch of heart and breathing. It hung there like a star, our flag, weather-soiled, unpretentious; and it came to me like a breath from some good land, kindly, strong, and formidable, showing its honest face in these base waters. It spread there like the sun in a green place.

I was spent, exhausted, but, "Chuck us a rope, mate; chuck us a rope!" I managed to sing out, and the man watching there heard me.

"Right you are, lad," came back to me in broad Yorkshire. A few moments later I stood dripping and shivering, yet thoroughly happy, on the deck of the good ship *Sarah*, out from Hull.

The captain was in his bunk, a cheerful old salt with gray whiskers round his throat and shaven lips.

I told him so much of my story as was prudent. There had been a mistake; I had been arrested for a revolutionary, and being lucky, had managed to find the river and

come aboard in this informal way. It was a likely story and one that might easily happen in this haphazard town.

He gave me his own spare bed in the chart room, wrapped me up well in a half-dozen blankets, gave me biscuits and steaming cocoa to go on with, and finished every sentence that he began, with, "No Russian comes aboard this ship." I omit the violent, not to say sanguinary, epithets which coloured this final observation.

It was highly improbable that any Russian, other than the customs officers, would come aboard. Bobroff certainly, whatever he might do in the castle, would never dare to pursue me publicly; might even now be concocting the lies and apologies which he would be sure to circulate should any official action follow on his entirely illegal conduct towards myself.

Should our consul or the Petersburg Embassy intervene, Bobroff would, of course, lay all the blame on his subordinates; he had known nothing whatsoever about this whole affair; and there was only my word to go against his, and I, very naturally, must be mistaken. His regrets, apologies, and official expressions of sorrow, I could also picture. I must be more careful, he would add; Riga was a dangerous place, and his soldiers and underlings not always too well instructed. But of course I would make no complaint; firstly, because I had no wish to leave Riga, and leave I must if there were any public quarrel between myself and his Excellency; and lastly, and more important, was the impossibility of dragging such private affairs as were at the bottom of this attempt to the scandalous daylight that must ensue. Joan's name must be protected at any cost; and, really, I bore Bobroff no resentment, for had he not made something approaching an actuality of the

man with whom all these years I had sought a reckoning? De Jarnac had come out of the mists and improbabilities which previously had surrounded him, and was now a human being and close at hand.

By midday I had recovered sufficiently to send a man with a note for the hotel porter, asking him to see that I was provided with a complete suit of clothing, under-clothing, and all the rest of it; and while I awaited my messenger's return, the captain rigged me up in a pea-jacket, trousers, and an Irish frieze ulster, so that I was able to join him in a very invigorating lunch served at his own table.

No one had come after me; as I had rightly guessed all pursuit was ended for the present, and till I gave his Excellency a second chance, I would be safe from his attentions.

In the afternoon I went ashore, Captain Mundy insisting on seeing me safely back to the hotel. The porters smiled as I entered, fancying, presumably, that I had made a night of it and had been so far overcome as to put off my reappearance till this serene hour of the day. I thanked the captain and went off to my quarters.

My first business was to send a short message to Chief Secretary Nikitin. "Dear sir," I wrote in French, "circumstances beyond my control led me to your apartment early this morning. For this and the subsequent inconvenience to which you and Madame Nikitin were put, pray accept my sincere apologies. In the hurry of my departure I left with you the following articles: a fur overcoat, fur cap, and silk muffler, one pair of galoshes, and a dress-coat which you will easily recognise by the half-dozen miniature decorations, five British and one Japanese, that are sus-

pended on one of the lapels. Pray return all these articles to me by the messenger who will bring this letter. He has orders to wait for them. Forgive the additional trouble and inconvenience, and believe me, etc., etc."

In a postscript I added, "Pray give my very hearty regards to Monsieur Mimik. He is a delightful fellow, and I hope that he has not entirely forgotten his English uncle."

A commissionaire took this message to the castle, and actually came back with the articles I had enumerated.

"Whom did you see?" I asked, as he entered with his load.

"The governor-general himself and three other gentlemen; his Excellency sent for me."

"And what did he say?"

"Tell the gentleman that, though we are alive to the important nature of his engagements, we hope soon to see him again and trust that next time his stay will be longer."

"Anything else?"

"The four Excellencies sent their compliments."

"Good; you may go," said I; and then sat down to a long and carefully doctored report of the impressions I had formed of his Excellency, the governor-general extraordinary of the Baltic Provinces. I even had the temerity to say something of the dance and reception to which I had not been invited, contrasting its gayety with the dismal state of affairs outside the castle, the poverty and wretchedness that ruled in the town, the hangings, floggings, and shootings that were conducted by telephone in the country.

I told how Patiomkin had begged off the lives of his peasants; of Baron Koroff's suicide, just brought in to me by one of my German friends, which had followed on the breaking of his pledged word; and altogether I showed

myself a particularly well-informed and zealous correspondent with an eye and an ear ever ready for the multitude of events that I had been sent out to chronicle.

Often now when I read my paper of a morning, I think of the messages that are never sent and that, could a correspondent really let himself go, might prove of far more interest than the sober news of his despatches. Had I been able to give a full account of my first meeting with his Excellency, carrying the record down to my reaching safety at last on the stout ship *Sarah* moored against the Dvina quays, I really think the London reader would have had cause to bless me. But never for a moment can I see a London editor admitting such a story to the columns of his paper. It would be contrary to all his accustomed notions of what is fit and proper. Even in a less extreme case such personal details are ruled out. Yet often when acting for these gentlemen in town, I have thought that far more interesting than accounts of battles, bomb-throwings, and revolution would be the actual personal experiences of the correspondent which seldom or never reach the public ear, save, perhaps, in his old age when he puts together a cold dish of garrulous "memoirs" in which the very liveliest happenings are forgotten or omitted or let slip. Had I been able to give even a carefully twisted account of how I had spent the last four-and-twenty hours, alleging as a reason for my imprisonment the same story of a casual error which I had related to Captain Mundy, I feel sure that the average Londoner would have taken a greater interest in these doings than in the more sober narrative which, actually, I sent.

I put this message in the mail-train myself, and by nine o'clock I was in bed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IF on the various occasions wherein, reviewing my first visit to Russia, my swift descent upon the house with the iron railings near the Parc Monceau and the Château Jarnac near Avignon; if, when referring to the earlier episodes of this search and history, I have described myself as the hunter, now, with even more propriety, I was to become the hunted.

I had persuaded myself that I was to play a waiting game; that if I only stood quite still, letting things come to me, the hour would strike when De Jarnac must fall straight across my path. I would no longer hunt for him, I had told myself, but I would wait. I had not reckoned that perhaps he might hunt me.

It was natural enough after my escape from Bobroff's clutches that he should devise means of securing me once more; that, given a fair or even an unfair opportunity, his men would have me back again within the castle. To avoid furnishing them chance or excuse for my arrest, I exercised all my cunning.

I had permission to carry a revolver and the necessary card bearing my photograph which the patrols would ask for when they searched me in the street. I left card and revolver at home, and I was wise. The disappointment of the first party that stopped me was obvious. They had evidently been instructed to find no likeness between

myself and the photograph, and so have an excellent excuse for my arrest. Luckily they went no further than their instructions.

That my movements were watched during these next days was equally certain. Whenever I went out or came in, I felt that I was being spied upon. Bobroff must have had a list of all my habits: that I wrote between early morning coffee and lunch-time; then set off for Schwartz's, where I either ate in the room reserved for the Baltic aristocracy or else in the "merchants' room"; that I skated from two till four, paid calls in the late afternoon, dined perhaps at the English Club or at a friend's, and having all the news of the place at my finger-tips by midnight, usually sent off a telegram from the chief post-office before turning in for the night. Sometimes I would go on to Olympia with a man and listen to the young lady who sang "*Kuola, Kuola, Kuola, dai mne*," or watch the little dancer who shouted like a Highlander and was twice as active. As long as I was accompanied, there was little or no risk in these expeditions. It was only when I set out from the hotel alone that I felt Bobroff might at last find his opportunity.

Apart from police and patrols, the castle could easily make use of that vile scum known under the name of *Tchornaya Sotnia* or the Black Hundred in Russia proper, but here, in Riga, more correctly described by the borrowed word hooligans. These fellows, ordinary pot-house loafers with a weapon, were at anybody's service who would pay them a price, and the police were not above making use of them; though in a fairly civilised place like Riga, even the revolutionaries were determined that the hooligans should enjoy none of the advantages that, under official

patronage, they exercised in such cities as Kischinef or Odessa. Several times, already, a hooligan band had been decimated by the magazine pistols of the insurgents, especially across the river, where such a combat could go forward without any interference. It was this degraded rabble that I must particularly avoid.

Quite independently, too, of my own observations, I had ample evidence that I was being followed. Fritz and George von der Brueggen, Bruemmer, Hahn, and many more of my German friends, who, since I had acted as post-man for Princess Lieven and the little group of *émigrés* at Königsberg, had done their best to spoil me, all told me the same story. Fritz and George Brueggen even insisted on seeing me safely into my hotel on such evenings as we three were together. Of my adventures that day and night at the castle no one of them had an inkling; for I had told them little more than that his Excellency had asked me to luncheon, his other guests being the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch and Serge Patiomkin, Prince of the Tauride.

It was unfortunate that the aristocracy of these provinces held so aloof from Petersburg; when I asked whether the Grand Duke or the prince were married and to whom, nobody had any certain information, except that both passed for bachelors, though either might be married *morganatically*, — a tie which would be secret or only known to a few intimates. Bobroff's domestic affairs were even more obscure. He lived alone at the castle, had come down in a hurry from Petersburg, and all that one had previously heard of him was that he had gained the favour of the imperial clan by assisting them to several investments and speculations which, so it was reported, while placing several million roubles in their pockets, had been among

the indirect causes of Russia's disastrous war with the Japanese.

Money! How these three were rank and rotten with it! They had given me the choice between ministering to their greed and death. With them Joan came second and money first. If I had been willing to place my paper at their disposal, telegraphing news that must affect Russian securities, thereby enabling them to make and profit by a rising or a falling market, they would have overlooked the rest and let their personal rancour wait. Why all three should be against me was not quite clear, though Bobroff, as a jackal desirous of pleasing a princely superior, I could understand; while it was also possible that Patiomkin sided with the Grand Duke against a commoner who had dared to presume where royalty threw its glove, or the other way round. Either Patiomkin or Paul Ivanitch was the man, I argued, though I had still to wait for absolute proof.

And reasoning thus, it was not difficult to find a place for De Croisnel among this group. Everything that had occurred bore out this supposition. I have already referred to the strong political and social backing, which had found him a billet in Petersburg after his famous London supper-party had spoiled his career in England. Either Patiomkin or the Grand Duke, in those days of the Franco-Russian Alliance, could have arranged that quite easily. Like Bobroff he served them, to-day in Paris, yesterday in Petersburg, and was, no doubt, enriching himself and enriching them in much the same manner as Bobroff had done and wished to do. I might have joined this happy party had I been so minded and valued my good name as lightly as these four.

De Jarnac — we will call him De Jarnac — had been gambler and speculator from the first. Nathan Aldis, the “great” financier who had talked old Sir Alison Garioch out of everything but honour, had been hand in glove with De Jarnac. Finance, or what passes for such, lay like a snake at the bottom of this whole tragedy. Finance had given De Jarnac his opportunity; it was finance, even more than the Russian, that had robbed me of my Joan. She had been sacrificed to that base god, her white body laid on his altar, and she no more than a margin, a call, a difference, to make good on some settling day. These men, who had offered me the debasement of the newspaper represented and my personal dishonour as the price of life, were of the kind that would find no difficulty in such a bargain as one of them had struck with old Sir Alison. To them it would come easy and as a natural way of winning what they could not gain by love.

But of more interest than these arguments and reflections is what I could learn of Joan herself, — my Joan who had sung to me at Bobroff’s party. Many of my Russian friends had been present, and these I questioned, leaving them to guess from which particular corner of the castle I had been a listener.

Madame Nikitin, the wife of the blue-and-gold chief secretary, I had met a few days after my escape at one of Madame Daragan’s evenings. Not till I asked after her little boy Mimik did she recognise me as the refugee who had made such a pother in her lodging so early in the morning. Her husband, it appeared, had told her no more than that I had been arrested by mistake, nor did I undeceive her.

At first I was inclined to be suspicious at her show of interest; she asked me a hundred questions and was very,

very charming. I had heard so much of the beautiful female spy — and Madame Nikitin was beautiful — that her invitations and interest aroused a strong distrust. Mimik, however, had enjoyed the adventure immensely, and before very long, I perceived that the fond mother was strongly inclined to favour a gentleman who had made so deep an impression on her favourite child. My suspicions vanished, I told her of Mimik and his cry of "*Dyeda*," and how he had discovered the front door for me and raced me through the empty rooms. It was possible that the little chap had saved my life.

Madame Nikitin spoke English.

"And who was the lady that sang so charmingly in English on that night?" I asked.

Madame Nikitin remembered her perfectly, but did not know.

"She was one of the Segewold party," she explained. "Segewold is the name of the Patiomkin estate. His Highness is entertaining a large party there to meet the Grand Duke, and what should we poor people in Riga know of all these great ladies from Petersburg? There are no presentations when royalty is entertained," said Madame Nikitin, regretfully; "the Grand Duke or his Highness send for one, and that is all."

And I could obtain no more except the idlest and most improbable gossip from any of the Russians who had been present. To discuss Joan with them would have hardly been to do her honour, and failing certain information, it was best to keep silent.

One more mystery of that night was still to be unravelled. Who was the mysterious person, his breast covered with orders, who had brought the guard to my cell and then so

noiselessly and abruptly secured my escape? It had been too dark to see his face, and his voice was barely a whisper. Often I had wondered who he might be and why he had acted so promptly in my favour. On the tenth day from then a second mystery was to be added to this first. Returning one late afternoon to the hotel, I found a letter waiting for me with the porter.

"Do not engage the cabman with the red beard," it read, and that was all, — no date, no heading, and no signature.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"Do not engage the cabman with the red beard:" there was a whole rank of one- and two-horse sleighs opposite the hotel and lined up in front of the theatre. Whenever I wanted one, I would step into the street and hold up one or two fingers, according to my inclination or the hurry of my business. One finger, and the single-horse sleighs would race across; two, and I had a pair. You never spoke to the driver but let him dash off, just tugging at the right-hand corner of his cape if you wanted him to turn in that direction, and the same with the left. If you were feeling very loquacious, you called out your directions in Russian, and he obeyed. On the day during which the above mysterious message reached me I could discover no cabman with a red beard.

The next morning, however, he was there, dashing up very promptly as soon as I showed my face on the doorstep of the hotel, and with an engaging "*Pjalst*," offering me the use of his vehicle. I preferred to walk.

Three days in succession I watched him, and it was always the same. Towards me he would come charging with the utmost promptitude; any other guest he ignored. My unknown informant was right. This driver was waiting for me.

Seeing I steadily refused him, he must have used some secret influence with the other cabmen. Now, instead of

two or three of them racing across when I signalled, only he moved out. On the fourth day I let him take me to our Consulate, and he went like anybody else.

The fifth and sixth days it was the same; but I only took him in broad daylight when any little game that he might try to play on me could easily be thwarted. The next days I tried him by night, and he seemed quite trustworthy. He was either attempting to win my confidence or I had been made the victim of a pointless joke.

During the second week of his attendance on the rank there came an evening when I had two engagements; the first was to dine with the English managers of the cotton-mills that are at Sassenhof, a settlement some five miles outside Riga; the second was an invitation to attend a sitting of the Krakenbank, a Bohemian brotherhood that meets in a room arranged like a cave beneath the sea, and whose members recite original verses, drink deep draughts of lager beer, and, like Odd Fellows, Buffaloes, and other similar companies, possess a ritual and certain quaintnesses of costume wherein they take a pleasant if ingenuous delight.

At six that evening I was ready to set out, and up trotted the red-bearded cabman; smiling as usual, his rugs turned back, and he waiting to tuck me comfortably in as soon as I had engaged him.

I tested him to-day, for, if he really meant mischief, now was his chance.

I had let him go straight ahead, giving him neither direction nor orders; he turned down the Kalkstrasse, and without any hesitation, made straight for the wooden bridge that crosses the Dvina. So he knew where I was going; knew that we were to make those five miles of deso-

late suburbs where no police watched, and law and order had practically no existence?

"Where are you taking me to?" I asked.

"To the English cotton-mills at Sassenhof."

"Who told you I was going there?"

He hesitated, and then recovering his former smile, "But the gentleman said so when he engaged me outside the hotel."

I had said nothing of the kind.

"Good," I returned; "I had forgotten;" and forward we went, past the last patrol, the last police station, into the unlighted wastes where anything might happen.

I drew my revolver from my pocket — I had it with me to-day — and placed it ready on the seat. Should we be stopped and searched I could easily hide it in the sleigh; should we be attacked it was there handy.

If we only got safely through to Sassenhof, I had no fear for the rest of this excursion. The dinner-party to which I was bound was a farewell meal arranged in honour of the departing pristav of that district. Now a pristav is a fairly important police officer, and this one, so my English friends had told me, had, under the new régime inaugurated by Count Bobroff, become so disgusted with his duties that he had resigned his position rather than serve a master who countenanced torture and other unspeakable atrocities. The pristav, it had been arranged, was to turn up quietly; we were in telephonic communication with the station which he still controlled; and when I felt inclined to return to Riga, he had promised to see to it that I got back in safety. This my friend, the cabman with the red beard, did not know. So, once secure in Sassenhof, I was safe for the rest of that night.

Bobroff and his spies, apparently, had learned that I was dining outside the town, and also that towards midnight I would return alone and join the brotherhood of the Krakenbank. Of the pristav, however, they knew nothing.

At last we reached the house. I admit to a sigh of relief as we came up to the factory buildings, standing within their palisade, the great electric lamps suspended in their midst, showing workmen's quarters and mills and towering chimney, and last and best the comfortable villa wherein my hosts were waiting to receive me. It had been a dark five miles, past evil-looking rows of wooden houses, few people in the streets, and once or twice the blackness of a thin spinny of birch that had got planted there somehow and was the right place for a sudden attack or other piece of devilry.

"I am driving back at eleven; you can wait here or come for me," I said to the cabman as I paid him; "my friends would put up your horse and give you supper; it is just as you please."

He would come for me, was his answer; and soon I heard his bells jingling down the road that had brought us here. My unknown informant was right. This man was dangerous, and now, at last, he had his opportunity; or so he and his masters and associates might fancy.

We were a cosey little party of five men, not counting the pristav. He rang us up on the telephone, begging us not to wait; but he would be down within the hour, he said.

My hosts had sent their wives and children home to England, fearing for their safety, and they apologised to me for the absence of the ladies. Beyond we three Englishmen and the pristav, who was late, the company consisted of the head clerk and the chief bookkeeper of the concern;

the former, a German, and very sentimental when it came to toasting the absent; the bookkeeper, a Jewish gentleman, whose contribution to the evening's enjoyment was a series of brilliant speeches delivered during the intervals when he was not at the telephone asking for news of his wife and children who lived in an adjacent house. He appeared to be at the mercy of an exuberant imagination which expected every moment to find its worst fears realised; and the least of these seemed to be his house on fire and Mrs. Bookkeeper and the little Bookkeepers with their throats slit. It was a strange and rather exciting entertainment.

Twice during the evening we heard the sound of firing, and the pristav assured us it was only a band of hooligans, or, perhaps, revolutionaries attacking a government drink shop. Over on this side of the river everybody could do pretty well as they pleased, and he hadn't sufficient men to prevent them. The bookkeeper absolutely monopolised the telephone during these interruptions. The rest of the time we were fairly quiet, in so far as such outside punctuations were concerned.

It was a curious meal, everything — wine, cigars, and solids — of the best, with cigarettes between each course and, perhaps, a speech. The pristav, a fine big fellow in uniform, his baggy trousers rammed into top-boots, was especially concerned over this leave-taking. We drank his health, and he replied with real Slavonic eloquence. He had always been pleased to do his duty, he said, but since the revolution, the service had become unfit for a human being. He was a Pole, and in a few weeks would be back on the little estate that he had inherited, a civilian once more, with many a thought for his English friends in

Riga. We all made speeches toasting the pristav, and afterwards we three Englishmen and he played a rubber of Siberian whist.

I don't think I shall ever forget that little dinner-party in the Sassenhof villa far beyond the town and almost in a hostile country. The men living there showed traces of the strain; all of them had used their firearms a dozen times and more, and their Brownings lay everywhere, loaded, and with spare clips of seven or eight cartridges to follow, just as drawing-room ornaments lie about in England. Within the buildings surrounding us were 600 workmen, quiet to-day and quiet to-morrow; but the next day — who could tell? During the general strike they had been pretty dangerous, but, like the Letts outside, had always drawn back at the last moment; and Harry Small, the general manager, who was entertaining us to-night, they saw daily sending all eight cartridges bang through the ace of spades. A man who could do that would stick at nothing.

When it was time to leave, the lights were all gone out in the windows opposite. The great factory and its 600 hands were fast asleep, the white electric lamps shone over silent houses that threw their shadows on the blue white snow; all the earth seemed quiet and at peace as we stood in the doorway saying our good nights. There was no moon, but the stars were myriad and radiant and clear set in their wintry constellations; Orion right overhead and finished from crest to sword point, Sirius ablaze beneath. The red-bearded cabman was waiting for me, alert, cheerful, and ready. He tucked his rugs around me like a mother; a last good night, and I was once more facing that black road which ran through no man's land.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BUT before leaving, the following dialogue had occurred between me and the pristav.

"Will you do me a favour?" I had asked.

"Of course," said he.

"Well, I have some doubts of my driver, and I would like to settle them. This is a good opportunity. If I go with you and the men that you have telephoned for, my doubts will, in all probability, continue; for then he and the friends I suspect him of having will let us through."

The pristav understood.

"But if we are not in time?" he asked.

"Then it will be my fault."

"That is small comfort," said the pristav.

"It is enough for me," I answered; and then appealing to our hosts, "Don't you think it's a good idea?"

"Depends on your luck," said Harry Small.

"Well, I'll chance it;" and so it was arranged.

In one other particular the pristav came to my assistance.

"Have you a revolver?" he asked.

I showed him my .320 Smith and Wesson.

"That's no good," he said; "here, take one of these," and he brought a couple of Brownings out of his trouser's pockets.

I accepted the weapon, a good, solid, heavy-calibered magazine pistol. "And here's a spare clip of cartridges," he added, furnishing me with these as well.

So when I joined the cabman with the red beard, I had a pistol on both sides of me, and the pristav and half a dozen of his men were to follow noiselessly in our tracks. The snow insured this silence, and I now regarded it as pretty certain that I would keep my engagement with the wits and rhymesters of the Krakenbank.

During the first couple of miles all went well. I was keeping a keen lookout with a thumb on the lock of the Browning, ready to release it at the first untoward sign and sometimes exercising it for practice. In my other hand I had the Smith and Wesson, so that I was capable of a broadside from both quarters, with the odds on my getting in the first blow. The keen crisp air settled one's nerves, and, if anything, made me rather anxious for a fight.

Past the birch spinneys we went in safety, and I was feeling that perhaps my suspicions might be entirely incorrect when we reached a dismal stretch of waste land used as a place of storage by local timber merchants. Everywhere it was covered with square stacks of wood, of the kinds that in Russia are burned where we burn coal; or else there were thick planks such as are shipped from Riga in piles yards high and ready for the builder's saw and plane. I had passed this place a half-dozen times before and always been glad to leave it behind me. The road crossed it, and as we came to its most desolate part, my driver cracked his whip.

This was the signal. The cabman with the red beard was now going to earn his master's money.

To begin with I shot him dead, clean through the spine. I had never done this man an injury; he was ready to make away with me; I had no hesitations.

From both sides of the road four or five fellows were

coming towards me. I could, however, hear the faint hoof beats of the pristav's sleighs.

I sprang out to meet the first group, letting off a bullet into the white face of the foremost, and bagging a second almost in the same moment. They had not expected such promptitude. The three that were left ran, firing back at me from the darkness, but had I turned to meet those that were coming towards me from the other side.

A bullet went through my cap. I aimed at the first man's legs — he was hit in the stomach when we picked him up. The pristav and his men were close on us by now, and soon had four prisoners. The rest had vanished in the dark. So that attempt was ended, and there was no one to report its failure to Bobroff.

From the scene of this encounter we drove straight to the pristav's station, leaving a couple of men to clear up the mess and three more to follow with the ruffians we had secured. Miserable enough wretches they seemed when we had them safely indoors, mere lads of nineteen or twenty armed with cheap revolvers and murderous-looking knives.

"Hooligans," said the pristav, ranging them up before me in his office; "I'll have a photograph of them made for you and send it to you as a souvenir."

I have the picture put away somewhere, and it gives a very good idea of Bobroff's mercenaries.

"Why did you attack this gentleman?" asked the pristav.

"We were paid to," said the boldest; "five roubles each and a bottle of vodka, and we were to divide whatever we found inside his pockets."

"By whom were you paid?"

"An *isvoschik* — the one that is now dead," the hooligan answered callously.

They had brought the body of the red-bearded cabman back with them. It lay there limp and huddled on the floor.

"By him?" asked the pristav, pointing to the corpse.

"Yes," the other replied; "he engaged us last week, but only to-night did he come and say that we were wanted."

The pristav stooped over the body.

"*Eto ti?*" he said in Russian, — "It's you?" — and peeling off the big red beard with one hand, he looked curiously into the dead man's face.

I looked as well; an ugly, evil-countenanced ruffian had been this sham sleigh driver, now clean-shaven but wearing his own red hair.

"One of his Excellency's friends," pursued the pristav; "his Excellency has a peculiar taste. You have been very lucky. This is one of the secret service men that Count Bobroff brought with him from Petersburg, Praxin, a dangerous scoundrel, a broken-down officer of the Guards who had lost every penny at the gaming tables and afterwards sold himself to the police." He felt in the wide pockets of the dead man's overcoat. "Two Brownings and loaded," he remarked, placing a brace of pistols upon the office table. "You have been very lucky," the pristav repeated, and then ordered his men to take the four hooligans down to the cells.

"I have been lucky," I answered, and gave my friend some money to divide among his subordinates who had done most of the hard work. The pristav himself I thanked with a good deal of sincerity. "You will have to make a report of this?" I concluded.

"Yes, to-morrow I will have to hand it in."

"Will I be wanted?"

"That depends upon his Excellency Count Bobroff."

"You have guessed that he is no friend of mine?" I asked.

The pristav smiled. "Nor of mine, either," he said, "but I have resigned, and he can do nothing to me."

"And to me?" said I.

"That depends," answered the pristav. "Bobroff is your enemy — the reason is no concern of mine, but probably you are an honest man. That is reason enough with our Bobroffs. He is now awaiting the report of his dear colleague who perished in this affair. I do not know who killed Praxin, neither do you, neither does anybody. That is understood? Probably one or another of the two dead hooligans, or perhaps the one that is wounded, eh?"

I nodded.

"Bobroff will wait for this report," continued the pristav; "if it does not arrive to-morrow morning and he learns the truth, you will be in danger; but if you rise sufficiently early, see your consul, and lodge a strong complaint both here and in St. Petersburg, allowing Bobroff no time to act, you will cut away the ground from under his feet, and he will be able to do nothing but apologise all round. Your witnesses will be our hosts of the Sassenhof factory, and myself and none of us are afraid. Bobroff will most certainly have to apologise," chuckled the pristav.

I promised to follow this advice, and then told him of my second engagement with the gentlemen of the Krakenbank.

"That is splendid," he cried; "all Riga will know your story to-morrow, and Bobroff will be able to do nothing — absolutely nothing! Even he cannot arrest a man for being attacked by hooligans."

We were on the wrong side of the river, and it was likely, suggested the pristav, that if I crossed over by the bridge, Bobroff's allies might be looking out for the sham cabman and the victim they, perhaps, expected. He advised me to take the ferry instead; only the poorer people crossed by it, the boats were slow and one had to wait, but that way I would be sure to reach Riga in safety and unobserved. He would himself go down to the pier and see me aboard.

So we settled it. The Browning and my Smith and Wesson I left with him; there was a half-hour's crossing, and shortly after midnight, I stepped out and hired another cab that took me safely to the Krakenbank. It was plying in the square close to the landing-stage, the same square whose traffic-dimmed spread of snow ran straight up to the towers and iron gateways of Bobroff's castle.

At the Krakenbank I explained the cause of my late arrival and was congratulated on my escape. The story ran round these festive tables, and I had to tell it half a dozen times. As the pristav had rightly surmised, it would be all over Riga by the morning. The matter was dismissed, and with the others, I listened to songs and recitations, joined in the choruses, and was initiated into the ritual of this strange sect. It was a late hour when we separated and turned out into the solemn streets.

I walked home, — it was but a ten minutes' stroll, — glad of the fresh air and thinking over the events of the last few hours. I had no qualms on the score of the rogue I had killed; he deserved his fate, and it would be a summary answer to Bobroff's challenge. That scoundrel would pause before his next attempt. I entered the hotel and took my key from the hall porter.

"There are two gentlemen waiting for you in your room," he said; "they have been there an hour."

"You admitted them at this time of night?" I asked.

"They would take no denial," said he, "and they walked straight upstairs."

"Have you their names?" I asked.

"They would give no names," said he; "they entered, asked for you, and walked straight upstairs."

Were these uncanny visitors from Bobroff, or were they not?

CHAPTER XXXIX

It seemed as though his Excellency, already informed of the shipwreck and the circumvention of his little plot, was anxious to block the way between me and the British Consulate; or else what could these two men be doing upstairs in my room? To-night Bobroff might still have me arrested, and very plausibly, it seemed, if he had wind of how I had put a bullet through his man Praxin. Such an arrest, however, would not be effected by two men who had gone to my bedroom openly, making a secret of their names, perhaps, but none of their intention to wait for my return. The best thing to do was to go upstairs and see who it was that made so free of my apartment.

Going down the passage that led to my room, I could already hear voices. I paused for a moment outside the door. Russians! Who could they be? I opened the door and there sat two men deep in conversation; so deep, indeed, that they did not at first hear me. One of them I recognised as the revolutionary leader Arbusoff, whose acquaintance I had made at Tukcum after the siege of the Brueggen castle and the massacre of the dragoons.

I was heartily glad to see him again.

"Mr. Arbusoff," said I, going over to him, "this is really an unexpected pleasure."

He returned my handshake.

"I wished to assure myself that you were still alive.

It is hardly your fault if you are," he said; "I heard of your imprudence and came here to ascertain the result. Well, I am very glad that it is you yourself and not the remains of you that I am addressing. Allow me to present to you my friend and fellow-conspirator, Mr. Ilyin."

I shook hands with my second visitor, and produced a bottle of whiskey that the captain of the *Sarah* had first presented to me as a souvenir and then assisted me to smuggle past the watchman from the custom-house.

"If I can hold on till the morning," I replied, "I shall be all right. But how came you to know of my adventure?" I asked Arbusoff.

"I sent you a message some days ago," he answered.

"Do not engage the cabman with the red beard;" was that it?"

"Yes; and why in Heaven's name did you take the scoundrel?"

"He's dead," said I; "you'll find his body at the Hagensberg police station."

"Praxin?" asked Arbusoff.

"Yes, Praxin."

Arbusoff communicated the news to his friend in Russian; and Ilyin seemed quite pleased to hear about it.

I told them the whole story: of Sassenhof and my hosts out there, of the pristav, and how the hooligans had come out of the stacked timber.

"Bobroff will have a bad quarter of an hour to-morrow," laughed Arbusoff; "but you have not yet told us who killed Praxin."

"It was too dark to see," said I; and Arbusoff laughed again.

"It is not good to ask so many questions, eh?" he

chuckled; "I give you warning, however, that next time I expect to be obeyed."

We were speaking in Russian now, so that my other visitor could follow and understand.

"I did my best for you the other night," pursued Arbusoff; "it was a pity that you were not so well acquainted with Monsieur Nikitin's apartment as I am with the castle."

What could this mean but that it was he, Arbusoff, who had liberated me at the eleventh hour, cut the cords that bound me and led me out of the cell wherein I had been thrown?

"So it was you who came to me in the dark and are responsible for that escape?" I said.

Arbusoff bowed.

"Why not?" he answered. "I want you; your pen is necessary to us. Do not misunderstand me," he pursued; "I have no personal feelings in this matter. The days of my friendships are over. Such men as Ilyin and myself live for an idea, a cause; not for ourselves; as individuals we have long been dead, as revolutionaries we survive. You and such as you are necessary to us; we are anxious that Europe shall learn the truth. We ask for no more, neither partisanship nor an exaggeration of the miseries which are dividing Russia. You are honest; you have proved it —"

"How?" I interrupted him; for I was curious to probe the extent of this man's knowledge. Inexhaustible it seemed, and he a greater power than the official rulers of these provinces.

"How you have proved it?" he asked; "it was your honesty that won you the position wherein I found you that night you enjoyed Count Bobroff's hospitality. Had

you been dishonest, you would have left the castle as you entered. Am I not right?"

"Perfectly," I responded, "or such were the terms proposed to me."

"Had you accepted those terms, your stay in Russia would have been a short one;" and Arbusoff rose to the full length of his imposing height; "you would have made an enemy of the organisation which I control; it would have been our duty to see that your activity as a correspondent came to an end; and then perhaps Count Bobroff and his friends would have done the rest."

"You know his friends then?" I put it to him bluntly, for he was not a man who stood upon formalities or any indirect approach.

"Patiomkin and the Grand Duke? Yes," replied Arbusoff.

"Why should they be interested in my movements?" I now asked.

"In yours more than those of any other correspondent?"

"Yes."

"That is a question with which I have no concern, except in so far as it affects your public activity. Perhaps it is a private, a personal, question; in which case it does not enter into any confidences that may pass between us two. I speak quite frankly, and you must pardon me if I speak too frankly."

"Go on," said I.

Arbusoff resumed with a certain firmness.

"The private affairs of either one of us, mine or yours," he said, "we must agree to ignore. They may or may not be of importance to ourselves, but there, so far as you or I are concerned, they must end. My interest in yourself

is subservient to a greater interest; it begins and finishes with the cause to which I am devoting such abilities as I possess. Should you become an ordinary traveller, resigning your function of correspondent, I admit that such acquaintance as we have would cease. I am cold-blooded, perhaps, but the work which I am directing leaves little room for the finer sentiments, and life is very short. In Russia it is even shorter than elsewhere."

I understood the significance of this reply. In my capacity as a medium between Russia and the outside world Arbusoff would place himself entirely at my service; as man, as lover, and as friend, however, I could have no existence. These were his conditions, and they were fair enough.

"All right," I said, rising; "I am content. As it is, I owe you such liberty as I am now enjoying, even my life. You have the right to make your own terms, and glad enough I shall be to avail myself of them."

Arbusoff smiled. He had made his point, honestly, without threats, and like a sportsman.

"So it is agreed," he said, "that in the future you will follow my advice and warnings instead of putting them to the test?"

I gave him my promise.

"I shall have news of you all the time," he pursued; "as to myself, you will see and hear nothing unless a special occasion arises. Should you wish to communicate with me, leave your message with my friend Ilyin. You will find him behind the counter of a tobacco shop in the Scheunenstrasse. His name is over the shop, and he sells a very good cigarette."

"One more question, and I am done," I now added.



to the poorest student or *tschinovnik*. That is modern Russia."

I asked him yet another question before he left.

"The night you came to my cell and set me free you wore decorations; I saw no more of you than their glitter as you stooped over me. You were present at Bobroff's reception," I asked, "and as a guest?"

Arbusoff smiled. "Why not?" he said; "it is no great honour to receive an invitation from the governor-general extraordinary of the Baltic Provinces."

I would have liked to have asked him more about that evening, but he had given me so distinctly to understand that our relations must keep within a certain clearly defined boundary that of Joan and her singing I said nothing; for I argued that his warning really meant: "I know all about your personal affairs, and I decline in any way to be mixed up with them."

He must have understood my silence and the avoidance of any further comment on a topic that for me, at least, was filled with deep emotions.

"Then you were at Bobroff's party," was all I had said; and he, "A leader, as you know, has to be everywhere."

I saw them to the staircase head, Arbusoff and Ilyin, and there we said good-by. "Remember," was my mysterious visitor's last word, "a small tobacco shop on the right-hand side of the Scheunenstrasse."

CHAPTER XL

So great was my confidence in Arbusoff's knowledge and good faith that I lodged no more than a formal complaint at our Consulate, making the matter of my personal security rather an excuse for a conversation with a particularly able and gracious officer than a difficulty which called for diplomatic assertion. In brief, I went about my ordinary business very much as though nothing had happened, and Praxin and his hooligans but a handful of shadows met within a dream. And Arbusoff was right; the pristav sent in his report, and neither he nor I were troubled further by this business. The hooligans, no one appearing to prosecute, — such was the legal quibble provided for them, — were set at liberty, and for aught I know, may still be infesting a suburb of Riga.

The week after this affair I had my second interview with his Excellency Count Bobroff.

The temptation was irresistible. All Riga was placarded with an announcement of a bazaar that would be held in the ceremonial apartments of the castle. This bazaar was in aid of the Red Cross Society, the greatest of Russian charities, and according to popular report, the one that suffers most from the thieving hand of the official administrators. His Excellency would honour the occasion with his patronage; society, German and Russian, would be there in full force; in such a crowd I would run no conceivable risk. The temptation, as I said before, was irresistible; I bought a ticket and went.

I had arranged to escort Madame Nikitin to this function, her husband, the blue-and-gold secretary, being absent on leave; and so that I could renew my acquaintance with Monsieur Mimik I was to arrive early, join the family dinner-table, and say good-night to my little friend.

It was the first time I had visited the Nikitin apartment since that dawn when I had come so unexpectedly upon them; till to-night, though frequently invited, I had contented myself with meeting this charming woman either at the parties she frequented or at the Skating Club.

Mimik remembered me, and for an hour that evening I played with him and Lilia, the small sister I had seen fast asleep with her hair done up in funny little pigtails. I enjoyed romping with these children, giving myself up entirely to their gayety and spirit; for after the blood and misery that was my daily fare outside, it was delightful to forget reality and turn my face to those happier fields where revolutions are undreamt and the laws of the nursery replace the edicts of a Count Bobroff. At table the youngsters sat with us; Mimik, in charge of the Cossack-like nurse whom I had floored with the bolster on our first acquaintance; Lilia, very well behaved and only breaking rules and regulations when it came to the sweets.

Beyond the secret entry to the Nikitin apartment, the existence of which, apparently, was quite unknown to my hostess, there was an ordinary door communicating in the ordinary way with the rest of the castle. We could have taken it and so gained the state apartments where the bazaar was in full swing. Madame Nikitin, however, alive perhaps to my previous experiences in that quarter, proposed the main entry, and her sleigh was in waiting to drive us round.

As before, Alexandre was in attendance and helped me out of my furs.

This time he recognised me, a smile slowly spreading over his surly features, as much as to say, "And are you still alive?"

I might have questioned him, but I knew that he was on his guard and that all the answer he would give me here, as once before at Avignon, would be his favourite monosyllable "*Nyet.*"

There were many people in the hall, Germans, Russians, and even Armitstead, the mayor, who had begun life as an Englishman. I had exchanged greetings with a dozen friends before Madame Nikitin rejoined me, and on my arm, made the ascent of the great staircase.

I was a person to be envied on that evening, and many of the men congratulated me on my good fortune, or what they considered as such; for when Madame Nikitin, quite the handsomest of the Russian ladies present, deserted me, I made the round of the stalls with Baroness Isa Recke, whose small Greek head and rippling, smoothly parted hair made her equally prominent among the Germans. I looked out for Bobroff, but so far his Excellency had not put in an appearance.

We were really an interesting crowd, with the women all in evening toilettes and the men wearing their smartest uniforms. My old acquaintance, the general commanding the Riga garrison, was there in blue, with huge silver epaulettes. He recognised me and made me spend some money with his wife and daughters, the latter two pretty girls in white, who kept a flower stall. Madame Daragan was selling champagne at three roubles the glass in another corner; Madame Boguslavsky had a bran tub; and

Madame von Boeckmann conducted operations behind a large buffet. It was quite like a party where one knew everybody and was known to everybody. At intervals there were music and singing, but never a trace of my Joan.

Towards eleven o'clock the governor-general made his entry. To-night Bobroff was in full uniform again and splendid in silk ribbon and decorations. He moved from stall to stall, accompanied by a couple of officers, and everybody made way for him as though he were a king. To tell the truth, he looked the part, bearing himself with all the dignity that the high aristocracy of his country know so well to assume. At each stall he made his purchases, exchanged a few gracious words with the stallholders, and passed on to the next. The rooms were full now, everybody who was anybody in Riga having come to this function.

"If the revolutionaries were wise," said Fritz Brueggen, joining Baroness Recke and myself, "they would explode a bomb among us, and the government would be in their hands again. Not a *tchinovink* would escape."

We both laughed and turned to watch the progress of his Excellency Count Bobroff.

My German friends, though holding entirely aloof from the Russians, were yet curious about the dress and personal appearance of such ladies as Madame Daragan or Madame Nikitin. They also levelled critical glances at the governor-general, governor, vice-governor, and their staffs; but, socially, the two circles moved in different orbits, the Russians regarding the Germans as Lutheran and prim, the Germans with little respect for a people younger in civilisation than themselves and of a more expansive

temperament. The Lettish population was socially non-existent.

Bobroff had recognised and chatted with several of the company, always distantly, always reserving a nicely drawn line between himself and those whom he honoured. When he came to where I was standing, he did not hesitate.

I had doubted any open recognition such as that with which he now favoured me; it had seemed to me the last thing I could have looked for from this man.

"Ah, you are still in Riga," he said, halting before me and playing his part so graciously that I must have risen to a position of some social eminence during the few moments wherein he held me in conversation.

We spoke in English, his attendant officers moving discreetly out of ear-shot.

"I wish to see you privately when this is over," he said, "either in my quarters or yours."

I raised my eyebrows at him.

"The request is strange," said he, "but in warfare there may be a truce."

"You will come to my hotel?" I asked.

"If you wish it."

"I have no reason to regard your Excellency as a model host," I added.

"To-night I give you my promise that if you favour me as I have suggested, you will have no reason to regret that you accepted my hospitality — or, as I said before, if you insist upon it, I will see you at your hotel."

I was curious and perhaps a trifle reckless; yet so strong was my conviction that beyond my will was a stronger will leading me slowly but inevitably in the direction of my hopes, that I had little fear when I an-

swered Bobroff, agreeing to see him as soon as I had brought Madame Nikitin back to her home. If he would point out the way, I ended, I would follow his directions.

"Madame Nikitin will show you a door that leads directly into my own suite," he replied; "perhaps you already know this door," he added with a smile, showing that he too, like Madame Nikitin, had no knowledge of the secret entry through which Arbusoff had led me on that night.

"So it is *au revoir*," he ended; "a servant will be waiting for you; and as to the rest, you have my promise;" and Bobroff bowed to me and passed on.

Such was the nature of my second interview with his Excellency. We spoke in the polite tones of ordinary conversation, and nobody there could have guessed that twice this man had attempted my life and failed; while I, perhaps, was to find in him the very adversary for whom through all these years I had lived and waited. In a couple of hours he and I would be together and alone.

"And on what subject, may we ask, were you and his Excellency conferring? We are both dying to know." It was Madame Nikitin and her friend Princess Ourousoff who put this question to me.

"Count Bobroff has invited me to supper," I replied.

"Have a care that he does not sup off you," observed Madame Nikitin; and we all three laughed.

"He has promised not to; I made that stipulation," said I; and then we were silent, for somebody had commenced to sing.

I took Madame Nikitin into my confidence as we drove back.

"You are seeing his Excellency to-night, and you wish to make use of the doorway that leads from his suite to

ours?" she asked, when I had finished telling her of Bobroff's invitation.

"That is how we, or rather he, arranged it," I replied; "but if you prefer it, I will return to the main entry and find my way to him in the ordinary manner."

"I do prefer it," said Madame Nikitin; "I do not believe the story of your mistaken arrest the other day; I believe that Bobroff hates you and is your enemy. There!" she cried, giving me her hand. "It is only my instinct, but in your place, I would not see him here or anywhere; and if you see him, it will not be with help from me. I will have nothing to do with it — nothing!"

And with this warning ringing in my ears I drove back to the main gateway of the castle to look for Alexandre.

CHAPTER XLI

As I went deliberately forward, I recalled Arbusoff's words: "There will be no open warfare between his Excellency and yourself; I have forbidden it," he had said; though who he was to give such orders I could only vaguely guess and fathom.

Madame Nikitin's warning was a very natural thing, and from her point of view, entirely right; but that Bobroff had declared a truce she did not know, and the many wheels within wheels of this affair were all concealed from her. Bobroff wanted to come to terms with me in some new way; such was my own interpretation of his strange request. Nor was I very widely off the mark. After some slight delay I reached him, and sat once more in the Oriental smoke room where he and Patiomkin and the Grand Duke Paul Ivanitch had bullied me, reaching it through the very *salon* where my Joan had sung.

Bobroff appeared surprised that I should have neglected to follow his instructions.

I explained my change of mind easily enough, mentioning the lateness of the hour and adding that "if Monsieur Nikitin had been at home, it would have been different."

"You are careful of the lady's reputation," said he, smiling; "that is altogether an English idea; but let us come to business."

I waited for him to begin.

"This time," he pursued, "there will be no concealments.

Let us play our game with open cards. I will keep nothing back from you that I am at liberty to discover; you will speak as freely to myself. I am obliged to you for sparing me the difficulties of a secret visit to your hotel, and I repeat my assurances that I will do nothing contrary to the usages of hospitality. All this is understood?"

"I am at your Excellency's service," was my reply, "and as to the rest, I am rarely blamed for concealing what is in my mind."

"In the winter of 1900," Bobroff began, "you were an officer on active service in South Africa. Before leaving England you had engaged yourself to a Miss Garioch, and the wedding was to have been celebrated immediately after your return. You came home and discovered that Miss Garioch, with her own consent and with the full approval of her parents, had changed her mind. She was now married to the Count de Jarnac, a gentleman, wealthy but eccentric, who, having won Miss Garioch's hand, wished for no further communication or intercourse with her family. This had happened during the winter of 1900, and such was the position of affairs on your return. These, I believe, are the facts. The sentiments surrounding this episode may bear a different interpretation, but I think I am right in assuming these to be the facts," and Bobroff paused.

"The assumption is perfectly correct," said I.

"To resume," he pursued. "You were not content with these facts. With or without the connivance of Miss Garioch's family, you went abroad, following up such clues as had come into your possession. In Paris you discovered that the Count de Jarnac had given up the apartment which you had conceived to be a permanent

address; in Avignon you made inquiries and found the road to the Château Jarnac. There you were received by a half-witted old gentleman and the Russian servant whom I had placed in charge of this property and who is now acting as my *suisse*. Such mystery as attaches to the Château Jarnac is easily explained. This little property took the fancy of a Russian gentleman who was motor-ing through those parts. He happened to burst a tire opposite the château gates, and so made the acquaintance of the inmates. He liked the house and its situation, made an offer for it, and it was his. He begged the occupants not to disturb themselves on his account, and drove off. For purposes of his own which I am not at liberty to dwell upon this Russian gentleman made use of the name Jarnac. He had some claim to it, for, following an ancient usage, name and title went with the estate and were his by purchase. Briefly, it suited him to be known as the Count de Jarnac; there was small likelihood of his ever colliding with the imbecile old gentleman whom he had left in undisturbed possession; as it happened he had no further use for the house. I myself have occupied it on one or two occasions, and it was I who put the Russian servant whom you saw there, and who is with me here, in charge. Does this clear up the mystery?" his Excellency now asked me very amiably.

"Your friend made his bargain with the imbecile old gentleman?" I asked.

"No; he made it with the old gentleman's sister and some cousins. I have, perhaps, expressed myself picturesquely; the old gentleman lived alone with a female servant who seemed to understand him. These two we left undisturbed. Had my friend not married he might

have made some use of the house. Shortly after your visit he sold it, and the servant I had placed there was withdrawn."

"Your friend paid rather dearly for his borrowed name," I said.

"He could well afford it," replied his Excellency.

"Only a member of the Russian imperial house or one standing near to it would require such a disguise or could exact your services as an administrator of such a fancy." It was a fairly obvious conclusion.

"That is as it is," replied Bobroff.

"Then I take it that Miss Garioch is married morganatically to a member of your royal family, such as his Highness Prince Patiomkin or the Grand Duke Paul Ivanitch?"

"You may infer what you please," answered his Excellency; "but to continue with this history. From France you made the journey to St. Petersburg. There you hoped to find Monsieur de Croisnel, a gentleman attached to the French Embassy. The reason why you sought out Monsieur de Croisnel is plain. He it was who had introduced the Count de Jarnac to your friends, the Gariochs, and you thought that he would be likely to have news of the friend to whom he had rendered such a service. You were right; but you had reckoned without the fact that it would probably be more to the advantage of this young Frenchman again to oblige so powerful an ally as the Count de Jarnac. Here is the position: on the one side yourself, demanding a favour with little or nothing to offer in return; on the other a patron, powerful and generous to his friends. De Croisnel must have had little difficulty in making up his mind. He wished above all things to find an easy career

in the French diplomatic service, and I venture to think that he has been successful. He saw you at the Hôtel de Londres, and from there he came straight to me as the factotum and confidant of the gentleman whom we have agreed to call De Jarnac. The rest you know. You were expelled from Russia, not because De Jarnac was in Russia, but because we considered it a good plan to fool you with that idea. At the same time we telegraphed to the count in Paris, where at the moment he and Miss Garioch and the count's sister happened to find themselves. The result was a message to Miss Garioch's parents, threatening reprisals should this pursuit be continued. That message produced its effect," and Bobroff paused. He had made everything clear up to the point of my return to England; but the past was past, and I saw no special purpose in raking up its embers.

"Your story confirms most of my own conclusions," I now answered him, "but I fail to see in what way it applies to the immediate present."

"A little patience," he replied, "and we will come to that."

I lit a cigarette, and again he went back to the spring of 1901.

"The Count de Jarnac's message," he resumed, "produced its effect. Whatever your feelings, you managed to convey the impression that you had forgotten this whole affair. You travelled and made something of a reputation. We did not fail to keep ourselves informed of you. But you English, you feel deeply — too deeply!" and his Excellency shook a disapproving head over us. "Where I and my friends regarded you as convalescent or, at least, resigned, the Countess de Jarnac has only smiled

disdainfully at our reports; and," remarked his Excellency, "I must admit that we have done our best to shake her faith in you. She, however, it appears, knows you better than to believe that you are changed or married or unfaithful to her memory. Her husband loves her and is therefore, perhaps, not overscrupulous in the means he has employed to win her affection. You smile at this — it is very natural that you should smile."

His Excellency was right; it was natural. I had made no mistake in the woman I loved. Circumstance might thwart us and fate might make a mockery of our plans, its steel claws holding us apart, enforcing some other destiny than the one that we had dreamed, demanding sacrifices equal to our strength and fortitude; but she, like I, stood bleeding yet unshaken, rock-fast, disdainful, and impregnable to any doubt.

Bobroff rose from his chair, and pacing deliberately up and down the room, concluded his interpretation of events.

"In 1901," he resumed, "the Count de Jarnac had no serious fear of you as a rival. It would have been easy then to finish with you; for in Russia you had neither friends nor any position such as that which you now hold. The count, or rather myself acting on his behalf, did not consider you with much seriousness. We thought you an impetuous young fool who might be diverted from his course by such measures as we then regarded as sufficient. To-day we could repeat them — it would not be difficult for us to manufacture an occasion, giving quite satisfactory reasons for your expulsion; but it occurred to us, seeing that the countess has made no secret of her continued faith in you, that it would be better to profit by the oppor-

tunity you have so recklessly afforded us and put an end to the whole situation. We had resolved that you should not leave Russia alive. We have you in our power; twice you have escaped us; but you yourself will be the first to admit that we must ultimately achieve our purpose;" and his Excellency waited for me to confirm this very plausible conclusion.

"In any case I am quite safe for to-night — I have your Excellency's word," was what I answered.

CHAPTER XLII

"You are quite safe for to-night; but to-morrow —" and the governor-general let me fill in this hiatus as I pleased.

I waited for him.

"We had resolved," he pursued, "that you should not leave Russia alive. This would put a logical and satisfactory end to the whole situation. The countess would be informed of your death, which would be so arranged as to have the appearance of pure accident. She would then have no other choice than to accept this mournful conclusion to her youth's romance and with it the affection which now leaves her cold. If it affords you any satisfaction to know so much, I may add that her husband is as proud as herself, and has no desire to force his attentions upon a woman whose heart he cannot win. The methods he has employed and will continue to employ may not commend themselves to you; but in love as in war it is an accepted maxim that everything is fair."

His Excellency had resumed his seat again.

"There you have our inflexible resolution," he now added, "unless you are ready to accept a plain alternative or to suggest one. Money or the love of some other woman are what I am empowered to offer."

"But you offered me as much before, or the opportunity of winning either, which comes to the same thing," I interposed.

"Not unconditionally," said he.

"And why this change?" I asked.

"Frankly, you have won the admiration of certain personages whose sense of humour is, perhaps, too easily excited. The unexpected termination to our successive attempts upon your life has gained you this reprieve; in the one instance you assassinated your assassins, in the other you displayed abilities that are equally unconventional."

"And you mean to tell me that on account of what I must call my luck you are offering me another chance?"

"Against my personal will or inclination," answered Bobroff.

"In plain terms you are asking me to sign away my manhood and leave Russia either as your pensioner or with well-lined pockets?"

"That is what it amounts to; but apart from money," he pursued, "a charming woman such as the one you have just left has no attraction for you?"

"Though I would be alive, you wish me to provide you with certain evidences which would convince Miss Garioch that I was dead — morally or actually dead?"

"Some such undertaking would meet our needs. You could marry or retire to some distant place where, under an assumed name —"

"Pardon me," I interrupted him here, "but I am not the Count de Jarnac! And now, your Excellency," I continued, "I have listened to your version and your case with some impatience; perhaps you will be equally indulgent towards myself."

"It was my suggestion that we should play this game with cards on the table and openly," was his reply; "I

ask for nothing better than the frankest possible statement of your position."

"You shall have that if nothing else," I answered him; and leaning over to where he sat, my eyes hard on his handsome face, "We will accept the account you have just rendered, in so far as it covers the first part of Miss Garioch's married life," I began. "After Paris, Avignon, and Petersburg, I renounced the pursuit of either De Jarnac or the countess. That renunciation holds good to this day. Though you may decline to believe me, I have not come to Russia with any fixed purpose of recovering all I lost in 1901. My presence here and its duration have been dictated entirely by the journal which I represent; this stay in Riga was none of my seeking. With equal alacrity I would have gone to Finland or, for that matter, Timbuctu. Whether my coming here means that I am affording you an easy opportunity of putting me out of the world, is no concern of mine. That is entirely your affair;" and here I paused so that there should be no mistake as to my meaning.

"Go on," said Bobroff; "this is growing interesting."

"It is my intention to go on," said I; and continuing, "Whether I run risks or whether my presence here displeases you, I am entirely at the disposition of the newspaper I represent. Should I be ordered home to-morrow, home I would go; should I be ordered to any other country, to that other country I would go. There would be no hesitations. I am here, first and last, in the capacity of special correspondent. I will not deny, however, that could I prove either yourself or one of your associates to be the husband of Miss Garioch, I would demand it as a right that the individual thus honoured should exchange

shots with me. I might even go further and enforce this duel. Unfortunately I have no such evidence and can prove nothing. So far I can prove nothing, but sooner or later, this evidence must come into my hands."

"Must," he repeated after me; "why 'must'?"

Bobroff and I were facing one another, eye meeting eye, and at my last words it seemed as though for a moment I had pierced his mask of philosophic courtliness.

"Why 'must'?" he repeated nervously.

"Because I believe that no villain goes unpunished, because among my few remaining superstitions is an un-failing confidence in the triumph of right and the chastisement of wrong. You are at liberty to smile at my simplicity, but there you have the whole chain of my reasoning. It is short, perhaps, but rather tough."

"In other words you are a fatalist," said Count Bobroff, "and it is no bad creed."

"When," I pursued, "with no special seeking on my part and after several years wherein to test the nature of my feelings, I find myself each day drawing nearer to the one point at which my life may be said to have a meaning, you can hardly expect me to regard this long-delayed approach as either coincidence or chance; and, equally, you can hardly expect me to doubt its ultimate consummation."

"You believe, then, that in the end you will find your way to Miss Garioch?"

"Only in moments of despondency have I ever doubted it."

"Just now you are a prey to no such moment."

"Rarely have I been more optimistic," I answered him. He looked me over curiously. I was, no doubt, a new

type, foreign to his experience and difficult to deal with or explain.

"You are very much like a Japanese," he said at last.

"They won their war," was my reply.

"We will run no risk of your winning yours."

"You offer me money, or your suggestion is that I should transfer my affections," I resumed. "You are, perhaps, aware that I have an independence, enough money, in short, to regard my profession as an occupation whose material aspects barely interest me. That settles one of your proposals; the other is, of course, impossible."

"But have you yourself nothing to suggest?" persisted his Excellency.

"I have already suggested a duel. Am I to regard the Count de Jarnac not only as a scoundrel but also a coward?" I asked.

"In certain positions one is not at liberty to dispose of one's honour as one would like best," replied Bobroff; "and besides, where there is no necessity to soil one's hands, it is better to leave such matters to one's subordinates."

It was an insolent reply. I took it calmly. I had made my offer, but I could not give these people courage into the bargain.

"Your subordinates, so far," I answered, "have not prevented you from soiling *your* hands." It was as good a stroke as he had given me.

Bobroff rose.

"The discussion is ended," he said sternly; "it is the last you will hear from us. You have chosen deliberately, and nothing now remains for us but to pass the sentence of execution that you yourself have demanded. You

have refused our clemency; it is necessary that you should die; this time you will not escape us. Till to-morrow at noon you will be safe; after that I trust your fatalism may prove of service to you."

The governor-general extraordinary of the Baltic Provinces, of Courland, Livonia, and Esthonia, clapped his hands together.

Alexandre appeared, yawning.

"Show this gentleman out," said Count Bobroff; and to me, "I am obliged to you for your visit. Good night."

A few moments later I stood under the stars again with the grim walls of the castle behind me and the snow-covered square in front. A patrol went by, the sole living thing besides myself in all that emptiness.

I followed it, for the men were going my way. Through the narrow streets of this old German town we went, past sleepy watchmen, grotesque in sheepskins and furnished with stout sticks to use on anybody who disturbed their slumbers; past the police at the corner of the Kalkstrasse, where I turned off, taking the wide boulevard that leads to the Hôtel de Rome.

"Nyet revolver?"

I had grown used to that question by now.

"Nyet," I replied.

I had walked into a second patrol outside the hotel. I held my arms up while they searched me, and when it was over, politely said good night to them. It was a good-humoured ceremony, and one could hardly be out-of-doors without such search and questioning.

Arrived at the hotel, the hall porter handed me a letter with my key. It was from London, and its signature was

that of the editor who had sent me over to Riga and the Baltic Provinces.

"I would be obliged," he wrote, "now that the town seems quiet, if you would go up to Wenden, Walk, or Segewold and see what the troops are doing in the country. What we particularly want, however, is an interview with General Orloff."

In my room I examined the envelope carefully. It was gummed with the original gum; so this letter had not been opened at the post-office, nor had its contents been communicated to Count Bobroff. When letters had been opened, the original gum was steamed away and the envelope closed again with paste.

Orloff was at Segewold, I reflected, the guest of Prince Patiomkin, whose house he was using as headquarters of the army of the south. I would leave for Segewold immediately. Patiomkin would be there, probably the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch. It would be putting my head between the lion's jaws with a vengeance; but perhaps it might be a step nearer to De Jarnac and my Joan.

CHAPTER XLIII

So I was leaving Riga at last, and, if I could manage it, without Bobroff's knowledge; and the more effectually to go without hindrance from him or any one connected with him, I paid my bill early, had my baggage sent down to the station, and entered the barber's shop adjoining the hotel. You could reach it without setting foot in the street, where if a spy kept watch, he would know nothing and see nothing unless he happened to look in as you crossed the hall and entered the shop by its glass door. Nine times out of ten, however, a spy is thinking of anything but business.

Now the barber and I were friends, and I knew, perhaps, more about his customers than I had any right to know. If a revolutionary wished to leave Riga unobserved, he would call in at this barber's and come out so disguised that his own mother would not have recognised him. Once, in my presence, the police had taken such a man, pulling his false beard out by the roots even before he had had time to pay for it. I remember how one assistant, a tender-hearted little chap with unsteady nerves, had uttered a loud cry, then fallen in a dead faint upon the floor. The ring of bayonets had been too much for him. While the other assistant, who had actually glued on the beard, had gone after the prisoner with outstretched hand demanding payment. A blow from the butt-end of a rifle had made a gap of his front teeth; and that was all

the payment he was ever likely to get on that order. His pedantry had a comic side which made me chuckle, and without some small sense of the humorous, Riga during that winter was no place for a human being. It was best to imagine you were seeing a play; if you let the reality of events gain on you, it was ten to one you had enough of it within a week.

To this barber's I therefore went, after settling with the hotel and ascertaining that there would be no train in my direction till the evening. Bobroff should not stop me if I could help it. He might discover that I was gone, but where and how and why he would not know until it suited my convenience.

In the basement of his shop the barber had a little room, and there he himself changed me into a bewhiskered and hairy foreigner and received my compliments. The front door gave on to a side street, and now I could take it and spend the rest of the day in Riga unconcerned.

On the main boulevard I passed Fritz Brueggen and Anton Mentzendorff, and neither of them gave me a glance. I was not going to say good-by to anybody; a secret is no secret as soon as it is shared. Only Arbusoff must know of my departure and destination, and to get at him I would have to find Ilyin, who kept the tobacco shop in the Scheunenstrasse.

Ilyin was behind his counter, and I bought a box of cigarettes of him.

"You do not know me?" I asked, as he handed me my change.

"No," said he.

"I am Arbusoff's friend, the English correspondent."

"But —" he began.

"Look at me again," said I.

He was an expert in disguises, and taking me feature by feature, tumbled to it at last. "Dear me, but they have altered you!" he cried.

"I wish to leave Riga without Bobroff's knowledge," was my reply; "I am ordered north to see what Orloff is doing in the country. I will have to call upon him at Segewold, where he and his staff are quartered as guests of Prince Patiomkin. I shall drive over from Wenden, where I arrive to-night. My address at Wenden will be the Baltic Hotel. Arbusoff can reach me there until further notice. I will give you my next stopping-place by telegraph."

Ilyin made a note of these particulars.

"Good," he answered; "our friend will have this information within twenty hours. Make yourself known to nobody until to-morrow morning."

I promised to sit tight at Wenden till that interval had expired, and then I took leave of Ilyin and set about killing the afternoon. It was a day off for me and I thoroughly enjoyed it, lunching at my ease, loafing, looking into shop windows, and behaving generally as though I were a tourist with nothing in the world to do except amuse myself. Outside the Hôtel de Rome one of Bobroff's spies was on duty, waiting, apparently, for me to come out. I passed quite near to him, and he had no inkling that I was the man. Down on the quays I saw the quelling of a mutiny that had broken out on one of the Russian ships that go to Hull. My paper would have to do without this little episode, and could well spare it.

That evening I dined in the station restaurant, and shortly after eight, had taken my place in the train. No

one whom I knew was on it, and I had a compartment to myself. Clear of Riga, I came out of my furs and wrappings, removed the ornaments that the barber had glued upon my face, and was once more recognisable. By now Bobroff would know that I had left Riga, but my direction he would not know.

A couple of months had passed since my last visit to the country. In Riga I had heard how the peasants were all dispersed, and now sat in their houses with Orloff's men buzzing round their ears and dragging them out to be flogged and shot and humbled. He had 30,000 men in Livonia, and Bezobrazoff, with a similar army, was "restoring order" in Esthonia, the northern province.

Each station that we passed had its guard of soldiers, ready to search and examine alighting passengers. It was eleven o'clock when I reached Wenden, and the station was empty, a dark and wretched place lit faintly by a distant fire. In the town some building was ablaze, and everybody had gone to watch the fun. Only the station-master and a porter were about. The latter went off to find me a sleigh; the former sold me a certificate establishing the fact that I had arrived by train. No residents were allowed out after 8 P.M. At last the porter came back, and off I drove in the darkness to the Baltic Hotel.

Following the Russian custom, a document was pinned on to the wall of my room, giving the price of every article it contained, from bedstead to soap dish, from carpet to towel; so that if I got drunk and felt inclined to smash everything in the place, I might know beforehand exactly what I would have to pay. It is a thoughtful and considerate custom, and throws some light on the generous and impulsive habits of the Russian traveller. The more

artificial civilisation of Riga had dispensed with such an inventory.

Below, in the dining room, which in reality was half bar and half dining room, were several officers of Orloff's army and a *Podjesaul*, or lieutenant of Cossacks. A very drunken student roamed from group to group, declaring himself an agitator, a Socialist, and various other forbidden things. Nobody took any notice of him or troubled about his politics. He roamed there like a dog that has lost its master, ordering drink that was refused him because in the same breath he admitted he had no money to pay for it, and finally he roamed out into the street; where, for his own sake, I hope he was arrested and given shelter till the following morning.

In that place nobody stood on ceremony or waited for an introduction. The night life, even of the smallest Russian town, is difficult to describe in pages that are read by the English-speaking peoples. Gorki describes it, indeed humanises it; but few of his readers, I imagine, can follow intimately where he leads.

An hour later, though I would far rather have gone to bed, I was toasting the noble Russian army, was responding for that of Britain, but was finally induced to visit the local music-hall, officially closed, but opening when my companions began emptying their revolvers against its bolted doors. Two frightened women, their heads done up in bandages and each favoured with a black eye, a male guitarist and his wife, and a trembling waiter let us in. We ordered a performance, and while the musicians strummed to us and sang, and the waiter fetched beer, I asked the two damaged artistes why and how they had come by their injuries.

Some dragoons had forced the door a couple of nights ago and thrashed them for locking it; the guitarist and the waiter had hidden themselves and so escaped. Orloff had closed the place and forbidden them to perform; what were they to do? When they obeyed they were thrashed, and if they disobeyed they would be thrashed as well. It was certainly a poser.

I asked these two young women whether they were Letts, or Russians, or Germans. They were "converted Jewesses," was their answer; and it is difficult to think of that reply without a smile.

It must have been about two o'clock when, feeling that I might retire without giving offence, I said good-night to the company and was joined by the podjesaul of Cos-sacks, who, for some unknown reason, had taken me to his heart of hearts. Together we walked back to the hotel. He had a room close to mine, and we chatted for an hour afterwards, one of his men sleeping like a faithful hound at the foot of his bed.

He had wife and little ones far away, and he was homesick. He spoke simply of these things, intimately and beautifully, with an almost childlike confidence in my sympathy and understanding. In his pocket he had photographs of those he mentioned; a woman with a good true face, and three sturdy boys dressed as he was dressed.

About four o'clock I was awakened by a neighbour who, whether after consulting the inventory or not, I am unable to say, was certainly indulging in a good many roubles' worth of broken furniture. Apart from this interruption I slept well and soundly, and shortly after noon I had found a driver who was willing to take me to Segewold, where I would find Orloff.

CHAPTER XLIV

It was good to be on the road again, driving over the crisp white snow that sparkled like a carpet of diamonds in the sunlight. The Cossack officer and his troop came part of the way with me, and it was impossible not to admire the manner in which this hardy soldier handled his pack of bloodhounds. He might have been their father and they twoscore of well-trained children. On our way home the night before we had come across a couple of men exchanging pistol shots in the dark. Without an instant's hesitation the podjesaul had swung the nearer man round and ordered him off to bed. The same nerve, the same confident authority, characterised his leadership of the troop under his command. Without him they would have been a pack of masterless beagles, ready to disperse and run before anything that looked dangerous. He and I shook hands at a turning, promising to meet again that evening if all went well. I had told him that I was bound for Segewold and Orloff, and that I was a newspaper correspondent. Last night nobody had cared who or what I was, and my military prefix had been a more than sufficient introduction. News of my arrival would certainly not precede me to Segewold.

Our way at first had run parallel with the railway line. In every siding were strings of troop wagons, barrack after barrack on wheels and ready to be moved down to Riga. The general's carriage was distinguished by the

my own convenience, and your Highness surprises me by intimating that I may plan so far ahead."

"Bobroff is a bungler," he answered genially; "he did not even inform me that you were coming here. By the way, it was I who insisted that he should give you a second chance. I admire courage and audacity." He stopped abruptly. "But you are foolhardy," he added, looking me up and down; "why did you not leave Russia?"

"I am at the disposal of my newspaper and not at the disposal of Count Bobroff," was my rejoinder.

"And why not?" said he; "I should regard him as the better paymaster."

"That is very old ground," said I; and then, "May I permit myself the remark that your aristocracy here in Russia has much in common with our urban middle classes? In both instances money appears to explain and excuse every action of their lives."

He smiled at this, and lighting a cigarette, "Sir Alison and Lady Garioch are hardly reckoned among your urban middle classes; and yet they were not above making a bargain of the kind you scorn."

It was a clever twisting of my argument, but falsely and cruelly turned. I let it go.

"Your Highness will excuse me; I have to return to Wenden and send off my despatches," I said, rising.

"You are not leaving Russia?" he asked.

"Not at present."

"You absolutely and finally decline?"

"It is useless to discuss the question."

"Well, you will only have yourself to thank if some misfortune overtake you. You return to Wenden by night and in a one-horse sleigh; you return alone?"

"Such was my intention."

"I will see to it that you have an escort," said he, "and without a doubt I shall prove a more accomplished statesman than his Excellency Count Bobroff."

It was impossible to decline this last attention. I was in his hands, and well he knew it. A servant conducted me to the main entry. There stood my sleigh and driver all prepared. Four troopers and a corporal of dragoons rode up to us as we started. "We have orders to see you safely back to Wenden," said the corporal, saluting.

His Highness, Serge Patiomkin, Prince of the Tauride, had, at least, kept faith with me.

CHAPTER XLV

I HAD dished Bobroff; I had secured a couple of good messages for my paper; I was returning to Wenden where I could write them out. But why had Patiomkin furnished me with this escort, and where was the Grand Duke Paul Ivanitch whom I had expected to find at Segewold as well? And my Joan, was she here? Somehow I felt persuaded that she must be living in this place, Patiomkin's wife perhaps, or maybe morganatically married to the Grand Duke, and a guest.

Once clear of the house, the five dragoons drew their sabres, riding two on either side, with the corporal trotting behind me. There was a full moon, large, benignant, that, with the whiteness of the earth, made the faces and accoutrements of my companions seem something spectral. The park through which we passed looked strange and wonderful in that mysterious light, fairylike, a haunt of goblins and elfin creatures of the north. There was a beauty and a wildness in the air such as the Irish poets once dreamed and Lettish legends record. The moonbeams tipped the five sabres with silver, and the silent horsemen all about me were figures from a story-book of old romance.

So we rode or drove, till suddenly I heard approaching hoof beats, and then a sleigh came into view and passed us rapidly, — a three-horsed sleigh with an attendant cavalier beside it. There were two ladies in the sleigh, veiled against the cold and shapeless in their heavy furs and wrappings. They drove on, but the cavalier halted.

Perhaps it was my Joan who had thus passed me — to-day I know it was none other: perhaps it was my Joan had occurred to me then; for the corporal had ordered my driver to go faster; the men on both sides of me had closed up; and all was swift and sudden and over in the instant it began.

The horseman who had ridden beside the sleigh had turned, and putting his beast to the gallop, was now come up to us.

"Are you going to Wenden?" he called out.

"No," answered the corporal.

"Yes," cried I.

"Halt," said the newcomer.

The corporal hesitated.

"Halt, I say;". and so peremptory was the summons that we all reined up.

It was the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch who was addressing us.

"I want a telegram sent off from Wenden; are you going there or are you not?"

Again the corporal said, "No."

"I am going there; perhaps your Imperial Highness —"

"Ha, it's you again," and the Grand Duke burst out laughing; "but in the name of Heaven, what are you doing here?" he cried.

"My newspaper required an interview with General Orloff."

"I thought Bobroff had put an end to you," was the gracious answer.

"Not yet," said I.

"And why not?" asked the Grand Duke.

"Bobroff must furnish you with a reply."

Paul Ivanuitch turned from me to the corporal.

"Where are you taking this gentleman?" he asked.

The corporal answered quite stolidly, quite calmly: "Our orders are to escort the gentleman to the Cremon Lake, to blow a hole in the ice with a dynamite cartridge and throw him in. For this we get ten roubles a man and I ten roubles extra."

"So that is why you are not going to Wenden?" asked the Grand Duke.

"Yes," said the corporal.

"Well, *bon voyage*;" and the Romanoff turned his horse's head and rode away towards the house. "I must send my telegram by some one else," were his last words.

We reached the edge of the park, and now, instead of wheeling to the left and so gaining the way by which I had come, my driver was told to go to the right. He looked uncomfortable, but obeyed.

For some time we went on in silence. The five dragoons were just ordinary Russian peasants in a uniform, and discipline plus sixty roubles was to turn them into executioners.

"Why are you going to kill me?" I asked at last.

"It is our order, Excellency," replied the corporal.

"And who gave you this order?"

"The captain of our troop."

"Why should you obey him?"

"Because we are his soldiers," replied the corporal.

"And because of the ten roubles," put in a trooper; "in a year we only earn twenty roubles, and of these the tax-collector takes three."

"So to-day you can do eight months' work in a couple of hours," said I.

"That is well put," from another dragoon; "to-day we can do eight months' work in a couple of hours."

In my pocket-book I had some seven hundred roubles, and it seemed to me that I might be able to strike a bargain with these men.

"Suppose," said I, "that, instead of ten roubles extra for the corporal, I could find somebody who would give you a hundred roubles apiece and two hundred roubles for the corporal, would you not sell me to this friend?"

"No," answered the corporal; "we have received our orders."

"But supposing that this friend of mine were to offer you ten times as much as my enemy, so that, instead of your being able to do eight months' work in a couple of hours, my friend could say, 'Here are the wages of six years' work'?"

"Has a man any such friend? Only in heaven have men such friends," put in the first trooper.

"There are no such friends," said a second trooper.

"If I had a hundred roubles, I would go home to Smolensk and start a baker's shop," added a third.

'And if I were the corporal and had two hundred, I would buy twelve bottles of vodka and marry Leontieff's daughter.'

"Peace," said the corporal; "we are true men and have our orders, and the *barin* has no such friend."

"I myself will give you a hundred roubles for the dynamite cartridge," I now put in.

"That is not allowed," said the corporal.

"If I were a corporal, I would sell him the cartridge," remarked the first trooper.

"And for two hundred roubles I would kill the corporal

"Podjesaul," I cried, as he drew abreast of us, and the recognition was mutual.

He welcomed me, and said I must go back to Wenden with him and his troop.

"But this corporal here," I answered, "says he has orders to drown me in Lake Cremon."

The podjesaul was furious.

"The gentleman is no Lett; he is a friend of mine!" he cried.

"I obey orders," answered the corporal.

"My orders are that you go back to your officer and tell him that the gentleman is no Lett;" and to me, "Let us go on, these peasants are all mad," he said.

"But what about our hundred roubles each?" asked the first dragoon.

I had made the offer and I shelled out.

"Must we still kill the corporal?" asked the third.

"No, let him live," said I.

"Fools," cried the corporal, "we could have taken his money by force; who would have prevented it?"

No one, apparently, with the single exception of myself, had thought of that till now; and I had long ago resolved to chance it.

"Let us go on," said the podjesaul; and soon I was telling him of my interview with Orloff and asking him whether he would not, possibly, get into trouble for sailing into the dragoons.

"You are my friend," was his reply, "and that is enough." He added, "A Cossack takes no notice of dragoons."

CHAPTER XLVI

WHETHER as revolutionary or paid assassin, the Russian seems to me the greatest bungler so far known to history. It is easy enough to plan an act of violence, but it is the execution of the idea that counts, and theory is the least part of the battle. The Russian is the Hamlet among European peoples; he moves by fits and starts, is afire one moment, inert the next. Patiomkin, giving an order to an officer who gave a second order, thought he was done with me; a European would have known the peasant nature of these dragoons and seen to it that I should have no chance of shaking their discipline. The podjesaul would have proved a stubborn executioner, but he and his were free men from the hour of birth and cared not much for Tsardom or authority. A few men — Arbusoff was one of them — could offer an exception to this general rule. Ten thousand Arbusoffs, and the Revolution would have swept all before it.

At Wenden I wrote out my messages and put them in the post. No one here would stop them, and the European mail went through within an hour. So I had done most of my work, and there was only a telegram to be sent off giving the skeleton of things and an address should London have new orders for me. I must also send a message to Ilyin at Riga; for I was going North to-morrow to see some more of this "pacification," and, incidentally, to dodge my enemies of Segewold.

As I came out of the telegraph office, into whom should I run but Arbusoff himself! It was just on eleven o'clock at night, and the office, my friend the podjesaul assisting, had been specially opened for my benefit. Arbusoff took no notice of me; a glance at his steel-cold face and I knew that he did not wish to be recognised. With him was an officer of cavalry and the two had business here.

I had said good-night to the company downstairs and was smoking a pipe before retiring to my bed when there was a knock at the door, and, as I turned the key back, a voice which said, "It is I, Arbusoff."

He entered without more ado and speaking rapidly, "You have been to Segewold?" he began.

"This afternoon."

"Any adventures?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"Whom did you see?"

"Orloff, Patiomkin, and the Grand Duke."

"They had a shot at you?"

"A very poor one."

"And they swore to me that this should end!" Arbusoff was in a rage.

"They insist on my leaving Russia."

"And I insist that you stay," said he.

"Such is my intention;" but Arbusoff was not listening.

"I go to Segewold to-night," he began abruptly, "and I shall have something to say to these two fools. This is the last attempt that they will make upon you. Another, and I shall introduce you to the lady whose existence you and I have so far agreed to ignore, and, further, I shall introduce you to her husband!" Arbusoff was most certainly aroused.

What could this mean but that, if a new attempt were made upon my life, whether instigated by Bobroff, the Grand Duke, or the Prince, he himself would give my Joan back to me and bring me face to face with the scoundrel who had bought her?

"You would welcome such an attempt?" He was smiling now.

"I am here as the servant of a newspaper; but —" and I left the rest to him.

"It will not be made," was his reply; "and now I must go. Send your next address to Ilyin. My sleigh is waiting — good night;" and as quietly and mysteriously as he had appeared Arbusoff went out again.

I turned into bed, leaving the candles burning, watching the shadows on the ceiling, and pondering on the strange entanglement that slowly but surely was breaking into order. It seemed as though everybody was in the secret but myself: Arbusoff, for his own reasons, so far silent; Bobroff and his two royal associates banded against me by that honour which rules among thieves. But I had little doubt as to the ultimate result. "Sooner or later," I told myself as I blew out the candles and fell asleep.

I stayed on in Wenden a couple of days, altering my plans. No one molested me; I was even allowed to borrow a horse and ride beside the columns that went out into the country. I saw the burning of rebel farms, the flogging and shooting of prisoners, the burial of the poor wretches when the soldiers had done with them.

These Lettish peasants had a singular temperament. Abject when there was some chance of escaping the death penalty, once it was irrevocably pronounced, they stiffened and faced the bullets unflinching and erect. Some poetry,

some far glimpse of freedom and national independence, had come into their lives, an idea, miraculous and beautiful as the soul's vision of heaven. Roughly it had come in, roughly it had been expressed, roughly they must pay for that brief dream; but ideas are bullet-proof, they gather strength from suffering, and, though I saw the legions of the present dead, I knew that in the future lay fulfilment. All these men and women that were slain had children in this world, children and the hope of children's children. Tsardom must yet make reckoning with them. A great tragedy will dwarf a lesser one, and though my own dark thoughts pressed forward crying their need, often and often I forgot them in this vaster darkness that held man's life so cheap, mocked at the hopes of nations, and spilled a thousand ardours in the void.

With Segewold I had no more business, but north to Dorpat I went and to Reval, hard in the track of all these soldiers massed by Petersburg. You could buy captured weapons off them for a few shillings; you could even buy off a prisoner's life. Half a dozen times I came across subscription lists opened with that object. The man got away, and the money was pocketed by an officer or two.

All that one saw and heard was clouded by a buzz of lies, by wild exaggerations, and fears that gave for truth what the poor mind had seen in hours distracted and awry. One had to use a sieve if one would get at facts; and these naked were terrible enough. I must have done my best work in those days, travelling from place to place, sifting hate from hate, marking how religion fought religion, race fought race. St. Petersburg was diabolically wise. Here in Esthonia, against Lutheran and Lett she pitted Muscovite and Greek Catholic; in Moscow, Pole and Roman

.Catholic went against Muscovite; in the Caucasus Tartar and Mohammedan destroyed Armenian or Georgian Christian. Race prejudice and religious passion — St. Petersburg had use for them, knowing with a diabolic cunning that these are the sharpest weapons of the human armoury. And everywhere she threw her Cossacks, whose business is war, who stand apart and privileged, pariah dogs of the empire, loathed of all twelve nations, of Poles and Finns and Letts and Jews and what not, yet steadily unmoved, retaining some of the ancient savage virtues that kept them free when all else Russian was enslaved.

By April it was over, and there reigned a simmering quiet. Revolution was muzzled and decimated, yet not wholly dead. The leaders had all got clear; only the lesser men were taken; and these poor beggars withstood torture rather than reveal the little that they knew. Arbusoff and such as he were still a mystery, even to the men who had staked life at their behest. In this the revolutionaries were subtle; of the Grand General Staff, so to speak, not one was known, or perhaps ever will be known. Like Arbusoff, a few had shown their faces and exercised their authority, but whence they came, whither they went, nobody could say. "In a battle the general does not expose himself," the lesser men all answered when I asked them why their leaders had deserted them. It was a fine, unquestioning loyalty. The war was over; there were many slain and captive; some had escaped these penalties; others were lingering, shattered in health and nerve. One saw men talking to themselves or gesticulating wildly, moved by some uncontrollable memory or the haunting of sounds and sights that went beyond their strength.

I was at Reval when the wire to which a special corre-

spondent is always tethered called me home. My orders were to leave for London by way of Warsaw, see what was happening there, and then go on. The revolution was over, I was no longer needed.

I could stay on in Russia as a tourist, but that would mean far less than honourable retreat. For a long hour I whimpered; I who had come so far, stood so near to my goal, counted so surely and so absolutely on a different ending! Was all my new-awakened hope to finish thus? Joan and De Jarnac, De Jarnac and Joan, both had been close to me, within arm's reach, and I must leave them. In my extremity I wired to Riga. Arbusoff must decide this question; before I had seen him I would not budge.

Three leaden days I sat tight, dead to everything but Arbusoff's reply. Even from Ilyin there came no answering message, and I began to wonder whether anything had happened to him at the little shop in the Scheunenstrasse. But till I had heard from Arbusoff I would not move.

I ought to have been in Warsaw by now, and it was possible that my friends in London might grow anxious. But here was I, seven-eighths of the way to my beloved Joan, each step to her unsought, a gift of Providence, the eighth still wanting. Something, I argued, must occur to justify the rest. Thus to torture me, then leave me in the lurch, might be in keeping with life's bitterest ironies, but had I not paid a sufficient toll already? So I sat tight, and on the fifth day came word from Arbusoff.

CHAPTER XLVII

"Go to Petersburg, Hôtel d'Angleterre, and wait for me. Reply to London that this is imperative. Arbusoff." So ran the answer which came to me at last.

Now my London editor was a reasonable personage, and if I put it to him that, though at the present moment I could give no explanations, I would be doing his paper better service by acting as I had acted and as I now proposed to act, I knew that he would not stand in my way. He would give me my head, trusting to my discretion and more intimate knowledge of what might happen in this part of Europe. I wrote to him, stating my case. It would more than repay him, I said, if from Reval I went on to Petersburg; I could not give reasons; but the wires would speak for me in a few days.

"Go ahead," was his reply; "Matthews is in Petersburg for us; if, however, you think that you have news he cannot reach, we won't stop you."

I opened this telegram in the dining room of the Hôtel d'Angleterre. For I had gone on, trusting to Arbusoff, impatiently awaiting his arrival.

He kept me there a week, and I had a wretched lonely time of it, filled with suspense, and wondering whether I would be able to justify this rearrangement of my plans. I might have switched him on to Matthews, whom I did not know and whom, to tell the truth, I took jolly good care not to know. I might have come to some fresh under-

standing with my paper, paying my own way, and stipulating that the exclusive telegram I anticipated should be regarded as a special contribution. I was, however, sufficiently businesslike to reckon that any alteration in my official status must affect my relations with Arbusoff, and would, perhaps, deprive me of the very piece of news on which I had staked my reputation.

Deep down in my heart — clearly enough I see it now — was a grim determination to stay on in Russia. Really, I was the drowning man clutching at a straw, hoping to find in it the end to all my struggles and despair. In the chain of postponement which all these years had stood between me and De Jarnac, between me and the woman that was rightly mine, it seemed that only the last link was to be forged and that all would be well and truly ended. To return home was to refuse the key of paradise. And so this week in Petersburg was to me the hour of darkness which comes before a long-awaited dawn, and Arbusoff was to be the herald of that sunrise. I had put my whole trust in him; I dared not contemplate what would follow if he failed me.

The week went at last. How I killed it, I hardly know. Motion was the one sedative of those long days and nights. I hired a horse and sleigh and drove each afternoon for hours and hours. Oftenest I went out to the Point, past miles of *datchas*, those little wooden houses beyond the town where Petersburg takes its ease during the hot months of summer. They dot the woods, each standing apart, all the way to the Gulf of Finland, now frozen to a sea of solid ice. From the Point I would look out over the ice into the sunset and then turn back along the empty road. Nobody was here in winter except myself; the *datchas* were all shut

up; it was a perfect solitude, saddened each afternoon by the pale and wistful rays of a northern sun and by a twilight lacking the twitter and call of birds, without joy, without melody, yet darkling and mysterious with a supreme silence.

Once, as I was walking on the Newski, I passed the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch. Next day I found his palace on the Neva Quay and saw him drive away from it. He had not recognised me; but I knew him. On the Newski, too, I came across De Croisnel.

It was the afternoon of the day on which Arbusoff reappeared that Croisnel and I ran into one another. I was on foot, and he had stopped his sleigh outside Andrieff's and was offering me his hand before I had a chance of escaping his attentions.

"Let's go in and have a cup of chocolate; Andrieff keeps an excellent cup of chocolate," said he, as though delighted at the encounter. "It is a pleasure to see you alive and well," he continued; "judging by the newspapers, you must have had some amazing adventures since our last meeting."

So much alone had I been these seven days that really I was almost glad to talk to anybody, friend or foe.

"We'll have some chocolate," said I, "but this time there must be no running off with news of my arrival to your friend, Monsieur de Jarnac."

He gave me his word of honour.

"I am finished with all that," he averred, "entirely finished with all that. I am rich and successful, and now it is my turn to play the patron. It may seem strange to you, but I have made a fortune over this revolution."

"Then you are on my side?" I asked him.

"Not on your side," said he, "but not against you — not against you," he repeated. "I am, if you will permit me to say so, your friend; but I have other friends whose society is equally agreeable and which you can hardly expect me to forfeit by an indiscretion."

"Such as the Grand Duke Paul Ivanitch or his Highness Serge Patiomkin?"

"Among others," answered De Croisnel.

"They too have been making fortunes over this revolution?" I asked.

"Nothing is sacred to a newspaper correspondent," he laughed back. "If it be true, one has no right to say so. The names of such personages must be respected. Even I respect them," he added with characteristic mockery. "Corruption only begins with the rank of count; when you are more than a count, you are merely honouring the business by your patronage. Royalty cannot sin and is above all ordinary ideas of right and wrong. The Grand Duke, perhaps, has deigned to profit by the misfortunes of his country, and in all probability has even created some of them with a view to filling his imperial pockets. That is what we poor mortals must call a condescension."

De Croisnel was, perhaps, enunciating the philosophy of certain courts, even that of certain republics where "the spoils of office" form the most part of the presidential wage.

"But what are you doing here?" was my next question.

"I have several accounts to close, various business affairs to terminate; then I retire from the service of diplomacy and become what nature from the first intended me to be."

Croisnel waited.

I seized his humour. "And what did nature from the first intend you to be?" I inquired.

"A gentleman; though you may find it difficult to believe, a gentleman," he laughed.

"The luxury was beyond you on our first acquaintance?"

"I had everything but money," he replied. "I had birth, my title of vicomte, brains, but no money."

"You could have married the last," was my suggestion.

"Never!" he cried. "I believed in my own abilities. I have met your Lord Mayor. When I was an *attaché* in London I met your Lord Mayor. He was a red-faced man and abominably ill-mannered; he put his knife in his mouth when he ate; his conversation betrayed a lamentable ignorance. If a fool like this can make a fortune, I said, contemplating his red face, his coarse manners, his absurd French, then surely I, who have twelve times his abilities, can make a dozen. I left the Guildhall banquet where this idea had occurred to me, resolved that by my own endeavours alone I would rise in the world. I would not marry money; but, like this ponderous Lord Mayor, I would work for it. You behold me in the hour of triumph. I have achieved my ambition, and now, not only am I a gentleman by birth, temperament, and education, but my investments are equal to my pretensions and I shall marry as I please."

It was a ridiculous conversation coming where and how it did. De Croisnel, however, had always the same airy lightness and vivacity; and, perhaps, he took the world and himself as he found them, living from day to day, and basking in whatever of sunlight was abroad. He had his view of life, and no one could say that he was false to it. Arbusoff, after this chance encounter, was to him as the

gray and wintry plains of Russia are to the gayety and tinsel of Parisian boulevards.

"Go to Number 14 in the Liteini Prospect. At ten o'clock to-night you will find me in the seventeenth apartment. Cross the courtyard. The name on the door-plate is Karin af Idestam. Arbusoff."

Message and messenger were waiting for me at the hotel when I returned.

Twice I read the note, found the Liteini Prospect in my Baedeker, then read Arbusoff's words again.

"It is all right," I told the messenger, and offered him a coin.

He smiled and shook his head.

"We do not work for money," he said in French, then bowed and went his way again.

At nine-thirty that evening I was going down the Newski Prospect, ready to take the turning which would bring me to the address given in Arbusoff's message.

I had time to loiter and time to think and time to exult. I had trusted my fortunes to this ablest and most powerful of all the Russians I had met, nor had he failed me. What would happen next I did not know; but at last Arbusoff had come to Petersburg, at last he had sent for me; and I knew, as by a sure and certain instinct, that whatever he ordered me to do would be right, and would be yet another step, and, perhaps, the final step towards the consummation of those hopes which I had nursed for six long years.



“‘IT IS ALL RIGHT,’ I TOLD THE MESSENGER.”



CHAPTER XLVIII

THE Liteini Prospect is a long, wide boulevard, each house of it containing a swarm of inmates, as is the way in Petersburg. I passed the *dvornik*, or hall porter, went through the courtyard as directed, and, entering at a second door, ascended the flight of stairs which led to the apartment numbered seventeen. The plate outside was inscribed Karin af Idestam, just as Arbusoff had written, and below this name I saw that the occupant was a doctor of medicine and could be consulted between the hours of two and four. A Finnish or Swedish name, evidently, and the lady practised as a physician.

I pressed the bell and Arbusoff himself opened to me. He led the way to a room full of cigarette smoke, in which two women and eight or nine men were sitting round a table.

"This is the English correspondent of whom I have spoken to you," he said, after he had introduced me to the company; "he will explain matters to our friends in England and I guarantee his good faith."

The faces all around me were intelligent and serious, too intelligent, perhaps, and too serious, — the pale faces of Russians who, during nine months of the year, live in rooms that are artificially heated, who go late to bed and rise late, and are little out of doors.

"This gentleman has not spared our enemies," Arbusoff

pursued, "and has himself been an eye-witness of their activities. I hope I have convinced you that the individuals Osol and I have indicated are our enemies," he added.

"The death sentence is passed," said one of the two women. Nature had given her the gentlest and most benevolent face imaginable, and it was strange to hear her speak of such a thing with so much resolution.

"Not yet," returned Arbusoff, "there has been no vote;" and then, addressing himself directly to me, "I am able to present to you a few of my associates. We are discussing a matter of business; in another moment I shall be entirely at your disposal."

A short, fair man produced a dozen slips of paper and a plate.

"The charges against the accused we know," he began; "they have been proved, and, as far as is permitted by our laws, the evidence has been laid before you. It is unshakable. Arbusoff has seen it independently and so have I; we swear it is the truth. According to our rule, however, these questions are submitted to a vote. We will proceed in order. These men are traitors to our cause;" and, handing each person a slip of paper, he waited while the formalities of this occasion were put through.

Everybody except Arbusoff and himself wrote something, folded the voting paper, and dropped it in the plate.

An examination of the slips followed.

"We are unanimous," resumed the fair man; "the persons that have been indicated must die. We have now to elect their executioners."

"The circumstances are exceptional, and, such being the case, demand exceptional measures. A traitor in the camp should be slain in the camp; a public execution is

unnecessary." It was Arbusoff who had interrupted this formal procedure.

"But you would deprive us of a right — not of a privilege, but of a right!" exclaimed one of the two women.

Arbusoff retained his composure.

"Let us assume," he returned, "that you and I are the guilty ones. Would it not be better that our execution took place here, in this room, rather than at a street corner in broad daylight, with a hundred chances of failure and the certain intervention of the police?"

The woman had no reply to this.

"Arbusoff is right," said several voices. "And, besides, he and Osol alone know whom it is a question of killing," added another.

"What, then, does he propose?" asked the woman doggedly. It was as though she were unwilling to lose her chance of playing the executioner.

"Briefly," replied Arbusoff, courteously inclining himself towards his questioner, "my proposal is that, as these two men are traitors, and, so far, are unacquainted with the fact that we hold evidence of their treachery, they should be executed on the first occasion wherein they take part in our deliberations. They will assist at such a meeting on Tuesday next. Osol and I will also be present. There will be delegates from the seven centres as well as Osol and myself. It should not be impossible to carry out the death sentence at such a meeting."

Osol now rose to his feet and addressed the company.

"Your assent to this proposal is necessary," he said. "Arbusoff and I are ready to do our part; the decision, however, rests with you. If you are agreed that the individuals indicated are guilty and will record your verdict

according to our rule, Arbusoff and I will see to it that our loyal colleagues are informed of what is expected of them and of our two selves, and the business of this court will be over."

A dark, stern man with a scar on his forehead said, "So it is best." The others assented, the two women loudest of all.

"You will know by the newspapers whether we have been successful or not," pursued Arbusoff; "if we fail, you who have delegated this task to us are still to be reckoned with, and, perhaps, our hostess may draw a prize in the lottery," he added, bowing to the lady who had interrupted him before and who seemed so anxious to wear the crown of martyrdom.

"During your deliberations my presence will be unnecessary," he concluded; and, bidding me follow him into an adjoining room, he left the others to finish the formalities connected with the killing of the two unnamed traitors at next Tuesday's conference.

He and I were alone at last, and "Now to *our* business," he began, bidding me be seated and lighting a cigarette. I followed his example and prepared to play listener.

"I have first of all to thank you for your faith in me," Arbusoff opened, "and you must take my word for it that you will have no reason to regret your confidence. To-night, however, I must ask you to trust me still further."

"As much as you like," was my answer; "I will only point out to you that, as between myself and the journal I represent, my reputation is entirely in your hands."

"I am aware of the fact and will assume the responsibility," he replied. Then, taking up the thread we had momentarily dropped, "I asked you to trust me still

further," he resumed; "you will do so by remaining in Petersburg till Tuesday next, by asking no questions until that date, and by sending a message to your editor that I shall dictate to you. There will be a second message to the same address, and the contents of this second message you must not know till Tuesday next. I am asking you to obey me blindly; in return I promise you a journalistic triumph which will be personal to yourself as well as incidental to your newspaper. You have only my word for this, however, and I ask you to accept it unconditionally. These are my terms, and I admit that they are pretty hard."

"If I reject them, my work in Russia comes to an end," was my answer; "were they ten times harder, I would accept."

To-day as always I was frank with him. My faith in him was implicit and absolute, for not once during our acquaintance had he fallen short of his promises. Rather, he had improved upon them, going one better every time, and showing himself the one entirely capable man in all the muddle and bungling to which I had been witness.

"Your work in Russia will come to an end with this," had been the significant reply to my acceptance of the bargain he had proposed.

Whether he meant that at last I should reach my Joan and make my reckoning with De Jarnac was difficult to say. He had forbidden me to question him, but instinctively I felt that such must be the under meaning of the pregnant sentence he had just uttered. Now he had unfolded a sheet of ordinary letter paper, which he passed over to me.

"This is the first message that you are to send to your

editor in London. To-day it is Thursday; he will open it on Monday," said Arbusoff.

What I read was: "My next message goes to you by telegraph. It will be worthless unless you observe the rule here given in cipher. TURNER FOR EVER AND DEATH TO RADICAL ROBBER HOUND COUGF FIVE FAUNA KICK FOP FB. The key to this cipher goes to you in a separate envelope one post earlier than this. Beginning with 1 and ending with 64, you have only to follow the numbers, rearranging them in their proper order, and the whole thing will be clear. Confirm receipt of key and this by wire."

"Will you please incorporate what is written here in a letter which you will at once address to your editor in London?" Arbusoff resumed.

There were writing materials on a near table and I obeyed. Arbusoff checked the letter as soon as I had finished with it.

"Now address a second envelope, if you please."

Again I obeyed.

In the first envelope he placed the letter I had written, practically at his dictation; in the second envelope he placed a sheet of paper to which he first of all made me put my signature and the words "to be read with message arriving twelve hours later." This sheet of numerals was the key to the mysterious sentence in cipher given in the body of my letter.

"Your editor will have both of these by Monday, and he will wire to you the same night," Arbusoff concluded; "late on Tuesday night you will be able to send him a telegram that will be a *coup* for his newspaper and will more than justify the decision you came to of staying on in Russia

until you had brought this off." He sealed the two envelopes as he spoke and placed them in his pocket.

"By the way, if you want some good skating of an afternoon go to the Yusupoff Garden," he was saying when Osol interrupted us and demanded his presence in the other room.

I too returned there.

"It is settled," announced the dark man with the scar across his forehead. "We are agreed that the execution of the two individuals who have received the death sentence shall be entrusted to the loyal delegates of the seven centres, to Arbusoff and to Osol."

CHAPTER XLIX

ON the Monday night came an answering wire from London. Arbusoff was with me when I broke the envelope. Message and cipher had got through safely, and he seemed relieved.

"That was our one risk," he said, "at least, so far as you are concerned."

"You intend keeping me in the dark till everything is over?" I now asked him.

"It is best so," he returned, "for your sake as well as ours." He rose to say good-by. "To-morrow at midnight you leave the hotel and cross the square. Before the main entrance to the cathedral you will find me waiting for you in a two-horse sleigh."

"Good," said I; and we shook hands.

"And bring your revolver," he added as an afterthought; "you may need it."

"Right you are;" and Arbusoff was gone.

I had little sleep that night, for somehow, deep within me, I knew that to-morrow would see the end of all my waiting and what must follow would rest between Joan Garioch and myself.

Nor on the next day could I fix my thoughts, but lived in a strange, wearing sickness of suspense, as though all functions of brain and body were deranged and only night could bring some order in their disarray. I cleaned my Smith and Wesson with an old pocket-handkerchief and

some salad oil; I snapped it and loaded it; midnight struck at last.

Arbusoff was ready for me.

"First of all we will go to the telegraph office," he said; "I have your despatch already written out; but you will have to pay for it," he added with a smile.

The chief post-office of Petersburg is but a stone's throw from the St. Isaac's Cathedral. We descended, and Arbusoff handed me the message of which he had spoken. It covered eight blue slips, and expanded and with suitable head-lines would run to well over a column.

"It is now eleven o'clock in London," said Arbusoff, at my elbow. "This will be in your office by midnight, and there will be time for a leading article as well as your telegram. No one in Europe or America will have this except yourselves; but I have made a point of that."

He certainly had, for the message opened with: "This is exclusive and we have twenty-four hours' start. I know you will make the most of it and stop all leakages. There can be no question of inaccuracy or mistake. I was myself present and am an eye-witness."

After this preamble Arbusoff had got to business.

"It is possible," the message ran on, "that the first news of the summary execution of Ivanoff and Becker will reach St. Petersburg *via* London. As yet nobody here is aware that such an execution has taken place. Both men, incredible as it may seem to any one unacquainted with Russian affairs, were in the secret counsels of the revolutionary organisation. Their treachery, long suspected, had at last been proved beyond dispute. The death sentence was, therefore, passed on the two traitors, who until this night had no suspicion that their double dealing

had been discovered. They walked quite blindly into the trap which had been prepared for them.

"The death sentence was carried out this night in one of the *datchas*, or summer residences that dot the woods between the Gulf of Finland and the capital. These houses stand empty all the winter, and except for the Krestovoky music-hall, there is neither traffic nor any sign of life in the country district wherein they are situated. It will, therefore, be evident that one of these *datchas* would be an ideal place for a secret meeting or a secret execution such as to-night's. They have, indeed, on numerous occasions, been used for one or another of these purposes. The murder of the notorious Father Gapon in this precise spot and under precisely similar conditions is still fresh in the public mind.

"The exact status and position of the two victims is already known to you. If I fail to enlarge upon the personal and political issues involved, the reason is to be sought in motives which you will readily recognise. I rely, therefore, on you to make good such omissions.

"The history of these executions and their necessity must now be outlined. The revolutionary party, as is well known, contains members drawn from every rank and condition of society. You will not be surprised, therefore, when I state that Ivanoff is far from being the most important member of this party. He was, however, admitted to its most secret counsels, and there were good reasons for his admission. Ivanoff, possessing influence and information quite beyond the common, it suited the party to make use of his services. Under the assumed name of Jarnac, he was a spy, a secret service agent; under his own name he was utilised as the mouthpiece of the

party in certain quarters to which the party required access. At his suggestion many officials of the party's way of thinking were appointed to important posts. Becker was one of these, and besides, had long been an intimate and confederate of Ivanoff. It is beyond question that Ivanoff's interest in the revolutionary movement was, in the first instance, due to the political advantages he hoped to gain from it in the event of its success. These you will easily discover for yourself, always bearing in mind the man's name, connections, and reputation.

"I hope I have made it clear that the party had sufficient reasons for taking Ivanoff and Becker into its confidence. Though both men were distrusted and, perhaps, despised by the more serious leaders, the laws of self-interest as well as of self-preservation seemed a sufficient guarantee that no betrayal of certain names and movements would emanate from either man. Both Ivanoff and Becker were making money out of the revolution and therefore might be relied upon to support it. The party was quite alive to the fact that these men, by anticipating the revolutionary and official movements and the effect of such movements on Russian State securities, had gained many millions of roubles, speculating heavily on their foreknowledge of events, and, to all intents and purposes, using the revolution as an affair designed especially for their profit.

"The party, however, was not averse to this manipulation of its secrets. It recognised this manipulation as the price it must pay for the services of these two men. The information received from them was valuable and of a nature almost impossible to purchase. Ivanoff, under the alias Jarnac, had for several years fulfilled his duties

promptly and loyally, and having access to the most exalted quarters, was well able to pass on each move of the bureaucracy as it arose. Becker, whose financial abilities are especially notable, passed everywhere for a firm and loyal servant of the government, but on a closer inspection, one will observe that, while he harassed and laid waste the unfortunate peasantry committed to his mercy, the leaders of the revolt in which these peasants figured have in every instance slipped through the network which it was his business to draw round them. With the one hand he obeyed and flattered the expectations of St. Petersburg; with the other he served the cause of revolution.

"I trust that I have established the personalities of the two men whose execution took place this night. The details of their treason have now to be recorded.

"To all purposes the man Ivanoff and the man Becker were one man. Becker was a creature of Ivanoff and owed fortune and advancement entirely to the other's patronage. Ivanoff, for his part, found his account in profiting by Becker's financial abilities, which, as I have already mentioned, were of a high order. This couple had even participated in several speculative ventures floated beyond the frontiers of their own country, and at one time were hand in glove with Nathan Aldis, that daring promoter and gambler whose dramatic suicide startled the London Stock Exchange in the winter of 1900. For reasons best known to themselves, and, perhaps, connected with their own safety, Ivanoff and Becker recently decided to destroy all traces of their connection with the revolutionaries. The rising of 1905-1906 had been squeezed dry; the government, to all appearances, had shown itself

the stronger of the two forces; by destroying the half-score of men who alone had knowledge and evidence of their participation, they hoped to destroy all traces of their connection with a movement that had failed. In short, to insure their own personal safety, they made out a list of such revolutionary leaders as were known to them. This list was intercepted and has never reached its original destination. Instead, it is now in the hands of the very men whose lives would have been forfeit. On this piece of evidence Ivanoff and Becker were sentenced to death.

"The opportunity for their execution came almost without the seeking. Under ordinary circumstances they would have paid the penalty in the usual manner; that is to say, at the hands of one or another of those members who are more closely associated with the terrorist section of the party. A couple of bombs or a man or woman armed with a Browning would have despatched them publicly. As it so happened, however, their names were down for an ultra-secret meeting, which, so long as the personages they had denounced were alive, they could not disregard. It was decided that the execution should take place at this meeting, and that the very men whom they had denounced should undertake the office of executioner.

"Ivanoff and Becker, however, had given notice of this meeting to the official who, so they fancied, had received their earlier communication. It would be the very opportunity for bagging the brain and heart of the revolutionary organisation. Again their message was intercepted, again they were assured in a forged reply that every precaution and measure would be taken to secure the desired result.

"Ivanoff and Becker set out to-night in the expectation of assisting at a police raid of unparalleled importance.

till sometime during to-morrow morning, the post-office clerk and his superiors would regard our telegram as a message dealing with nothing more important than the execution of a couple of revolutionaries by members of their own party. They might think that I was attaching an exaggerated value to this execution, or, perhaps, that I was an envoy of one of those peculiar journals that invent news rather than record news.

"Are they dead yet?" I asked suddenly, interrupting our silence.

"No," returned Arbusoff, coolly, "but they will be before your telegram is published."

"Who is killing them?"

"I, among others; I think this will be enough," he added, placing a couple of Brownings in my hands. "You have brought a revolver, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You may have to use it in self-defence, or you can assist me and my colleagues."

"But suppose your two men don't show up?" was my next question.

"I saw them start before I came for you," he replied. "They will not fail; and I promised them a *coup* that will make Russians drop a couple of points," he added, with a grim and cynical humour.

"Meaning their own assassination?"

"Exactly; but they will hardly be able to profit by it."

For some moments we drove on in silence, past the thin woods that lead to the Gulf of Finland and the Point.

"Ivanoff is the Grand Duke Paul Ivanitch and Becker is Bobroff?" was my next remark.

"Quite right," returned Arbusoff; "and, as long as the

post-office people suspect nothing, all is well. As for yourself, if you have any such intention, it is now too late for you to act; and, besides, you have staked your reputation on this message whose correctness I have guaranteed."

"I won't interfere," I said; "there is no possibility, however, of this business being misinterpreted in London?"

"Not if your editor keeps sane. My memory is pretty good and I spent quite half an hour over this little piece of mystification. If he uses the key we sent to him, he will discover that TURNER FOR EVER AND DEATH TO RADICAL ROBBER HOUND COUGF FIVE FAUNA KICK FOP FB is composed of letters that also spell FOR IVANOFF READ THE GRAND DUKE PAUL IVANUITCH FOR BECKER READ COUNT BOBROFF."

"And his telegram proves that he has puzzled it out," said I; and then abruptly, "The message in cipher that was signed Jarnac and which you showed me at Tukcum was from the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch?"

"From none other."

Equally abruptly I put my next question. "May I have the killing of the scoundrel?" I asked.

"There will be no individual killing; this is a collective affair," returned Arbusoff.

"But there are reasons," I protested.

"Have I not reasons as strong?" he answered; "my name was among those which were meant for the Minister of the Interior. The Grand Duke sought to do away with me; his life belongs to me as much as to anybody. On the list that was intercepted my name stood first!"

What Arbusoff's real name was I did not know nor shall I ever know. I have often thought over this question, always leaving it unanswered, always baffled by a person-

ality to whose origin and rank one had no clew other than the indomitable and masterful character of this great man. His associates called him Arbusoff, to me he was Arbusoff; but, on his own admission, I have it that this was not his real name, and the admirable secrecy of the organisation wherein he played so prominent a part insured the safety of the disguise he had adopted. My own conjecture is that Arbusoff was one of the several sons born to Alexander II by the Russian princess whom that emperor espoused after the death of his first wife. I have no evidence that this was the case, I may have made a wrong assumption; but royal he most certainly was, and, failing other explanation, this is the nearest theory that I can form.

It was some small hour in the morning when our driver pulled up before a *datcha* that stood in darkness, though behind its shuttered windows there might have been lights enough.

Arbusoff descended, and the driver disappeared.

"He will wait for us," said my companion, and knocked once on the wooden door.

It opened and closed again.

We were in a dark entry, and Osol was standing before us with a lantern.

"They are here?" asked Arbusoff.

"They have come," returned Osol.

"Who else is here?"

Osol gave the names.

"You have waited for us; that is good;" and Arbusoff begged me to follow him.

Osol still leading the way, we went forward to a large room, wherein I speedily made out the handsome faces of

the Grand Duke and his satellite, the governor-general. Six other men were present, and all save the two prisoners — for as such I must regard the condemned — seemed aware that I was to be one of this court-martial.

Bobroff and the Grand Duke exchanged glances of inquiry.

"What is this gentleman doing among us?" said the latter, rising to his feet. "I protest against the introduction of a stranger."

"The occasion is exceptional," returned Arbusoff, acting as spokesman; "before we separate to-night certain measures must be taken which will require an explanation in the outside world. I have myself asked this gentleman, who is the correspondent of an English newspaper, to be present so that he may record faithfully what transpires between us. In this gathering I must remind you that you are my subordinate. Beyond Osol, myself, and, perhaps, our English friend, no one present has any right to regard you as other than a member of the central council of the revolutionary party, a subordinate member who is known to us as Jarnac, and as Jarnac only."

Arbusoff had spoken.

Bobroff and the Grand Duke submitted with as good a grace as they could, the former contenting himself with the remark that he was unacquainted with the nature of the business for which this meeting had been called, but as a Russian, simply as a Russian, he would say —

"As a Russian, simply as a Russian," some one had intervened, "you speculate only in Russian securities!"

The door of the room had been locked and bolted, and, after this brief passage of arms, there reigned an ominous silence.

It was at last interrupted.

"All of us who are present," began Arbusoff, taking his natural place as leader, "all of us who are present, except the member known to us as Jarnac and the member known to us as Becker, are acquainted with the reasons why this gathering has been called. If the two members who have been mentioned by name will examine into their consciences, they also will know why this gathering has been called."

I was watching Bobroff, and more especially I was watching the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch.

Both had turned a ghastly white. Arbusoff's words had gone home, and each was now aware of his impending fate.

"We have friends at the Ministry of the Interior," Arbusoff resumed, "who share our labours and sympathise with our cause. One such friend has provided me with this document," and he produced the list of which mention has been made. "It bears my name, it bears the name of Osol, it bears other names. This list was furnished to the Ministry of the Interior by the accused. It was the intention of these traitors to give us over to the hangman and the rope. It is expressly stated that 'with the death or disappearance of these seven men, the revolution will be at an end forever.' The handwriting is that of the accused Jarnac, and the document was forwarded to the ministry by the accused Becker. I await their reply," said Arbusoff, drawing his two Brownings; "if they move, we shoot. I am waiting for them," he concluded, keeping his place, with the pistols covering the men whose lives were forfeit.

Now all of us were silent. A clock somewhere in the room struck the half-hour. We were all waiting to hear

what defence would be attempted by his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Paul Ivanutch and by his Excellency Count Bobroff, Governor-General Extraordinary of the Baltic Provinces.

And I, I who record this scene, knew that at last the man who had robbed me of my Joan, the Count de Jarnac or whatever he might call himself, was covered by a dozen pistols, and that before the clock which had just struck might strike again he would be dead, and all his power for evil would be ended.

CHAPTER LI

ALL of us were waiting for the two accused to speak.

"The list is a forgery," Bobroff now replied.

"Certainly it is a forgery," said the Grand Duke, seconding this obvious falsehood.

"You can think of no better lie than that?" returned Arbusoff.

Both men hung back. They had no answer to this insult, and as by some subtle instinct, each knew that he was doomed.

Arbusoff drew his pistols. In another moment all would be over, and my chance gone.

"I am the Grand Duke Paul Ivanutch," said the bearer of that dishonoured name. "You shoot at your peril!" It was a forlorn hope, a last bluff, a culminating impudence.

"That only adds to your infamy," replied Arbusoff, levelling a weapon.

There were exclamations of astonishment, there were cries of rage and hatred from the men who had been ignorant of the name and rank of the accused.

"A traitor and a Romanoff!" cried one.

"The imperial Socialist!" howled another, referring to the Grand Duke's notorious coquetry with advanced ideas.

They stood erect, bristling and white with anger, pistols cocked and ready, covering the Romanoff, covering Bobroff. In another moment all would be over, and my chance gone.

"Gentlemen," I had interposed, tossing my Smith & Wesson over to the Grand Duke, "there are reasons why this man's life belongs to me. If one of you will provide us with another pistol, I see no cause why your hands should be soiled in this affair."

The Grand Duke had picked up my revolver.

"You return it or I fire!" cried Arbusoff.

The Grand Duke returned it.

"This is madness," Arbusoff pursued; "one does not fight a duel with a man who is as good as dead."

"It is entirely mad," said I, "but you will let me have my way. You know my reasons and must yield to them."

This argument might have continued had not Bobroff interrupted us with, "If there is any question of a duel, I claim the right to take the place of his Imperial Highness."

"There is no Imperial Highness here," answered Arbusoff; "there is the traitor Jarnac and the traitor Becker."

"Jarnac belongs to me," I put in doggedly.

"I have no objection," said the Grand Duke, "if these gentlemen will permit," and he indicated the revolutionary leaders who surrounded him. "Indeed, I must consider myself under an obligation to our English friend for his suggestion," he added, with a bow.

"Your Imperial Highness will accept my loyal devotion; it will be the last service I can render to a prince who has innumerable claims upon my gratitude." Bobroff, apparently, was sincere; in his strangely perverted nature the one true note was this enduring loyalty to a master who had put him on the road to wealth and a career.

Arbusoff intervened again. "Gentlemen, do your duty,"

he cried; but now I stood between their pistols and the Grand Duke.

"Gentlemen, the slaying of this man Jarnac is my duty and has been my duty for the past six years, long before he was ever known to you," I said; "no one other than myself shall take his life, and I can only take it honourably in a fair fight with equal chances. What happens afterwards is no concern of mine."

To go from here to Joan, red-handed, so to speak, eye-witness to the Grand Duke's murder, when, for her sake, I ought to have done him the honour of giving him his chance, was beyond me. Stomach this assassination I would not, could not, and must not. Arbusoff read the determination in my face.

"Give the Englishman his way," he said, stepping to my side; "it is a man's way when there is a woman in the case, and, consequently, a fool's way. He has the prior claim, however, and we must yield to it."

"But —" began Bobroff.

"Silence," from the Grand Duke; "I am ready; and I too will have my way. Your loyalty offers me no alternative but the death of a dog; now, at least, I may be able to die like a prince."

Bobroff was silent.

A space was cleared for us, and twenty feet from wall to wall we stood facing one another, the Grand Duke Paul Ivanutch and your humble servant. Before my pistol he stood at last, this man whose coming I had awaited all these years.

A big lamp swung from the ceiling, lighting the scantily furnished room, showing the eager features of the conspirators; for even they were human in the end, and, now



“BEFORE MY PISTOL HE STOOD AT LAST.”



that Arbusoff had given the word, were not without some interest in the coming combat.

I had my Smith & Wesson, the Grand Duke was given the choice of half a dozen weapons. He chose a Browning; and, "All the worse for him," Arbusoff had whispered to me, criticising this choice of a heavy-calibered pistol in so narrow a space.

Bobroff stood beside his master.

"At the word 'three' you fire," said Arbusoff, assuming, as usual, the conduct of affairs.

He moved to one side and gave the signal "One — two — three!"

Knowing my weapon, I had aimed at a point some inches to the left and half a foot below my target, which was the Grand Duke's heart.

He had troubled himself with no such calculations, and naturally the kick of the heavy-calibered Browning made his bullet go wide, smashing the lamp to fragments. I had dropped him, but we were in the dark.

"To the door," I heard in Arbusoff's voice, "the other prisoner may escape, to the door!"

"I am on guard," came back in answer; and there was a scratching of matches and the lighting of a second lamp, which showed the door unguarded and flung wide open.

It was Bobroff who had answered, "I am on guard;" it was Bobroff who swiftly and silently had turned the key and rushed forth into the snow and woods outside.

"We must recapture him," and Arbusoff himself set the example. Out they rushed pell-mell, he leading.

"We came here by sleigh, so there will be no footmarks in the snow but his," I heard him cry in advance of this swiftly organised search party.

I was alone in the wooden *datcha* now, and over against the farther wall, huddled in a lifeless heap, lay the once erect and splendid body of his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch. I had shot true; my bullet had pierced his heart.

I found the small round spot where it had entered his clothing; further I did not look. I and the dead man were alone in this far solitude, in this grim silence burdened with a thousand hopes. So this was to be the end, this the conclusion to the Grand Duke's raid upon the house of Garioch. I had given him his chance; I had fought him fairly and squarely, as Joan would have wished, as Roy might have done, as Sir Alison, had he been younger and the years less heavy on his white head. And then suddenly arose in my mind, *What will come after?*

I had forgotten all such things as law and order and justice and the traffic of judicial procedure. The man who had fallen before my bullet was a prince of the blood, a member of the imperial house of Romanoff. Bobroff, if he escaped, would not be silent. Arbusoff I could rely on, the others I could rely on; but if Bobroff escaped, heaven alone knew what might follow! And then there was the long telegram to my paper, incriminating me twice over. Even in England I would hardly be safe from treaties of extradition, from the forces that this night's work must infallibly let loose.

These thoughts were interrupted by Arbusoff's return, followed by his faithful band. Bobroff had not escaped.

"We traced him by his footprints in the snow, and luckily he was unarmed, and therefore unable to fire off pistols and make a noise," said Arbusoff, breathing heavily from his half-mile sprint. "Your telegram will

still be unimpeachably correct," he added with a smile, "and this time there will be no duelling or other waste of time."

Bobroff, be it said to his credit, now that he had shot his last bolt, stood up to take his end like a gentleman.

He was pale but resolute. Only when his eye rested for a moment on the prostrate body of the master he had served so well did he falter for an instant.

"Gentlemen, I am at your service," he said, fronting his executioners.

"It is easy to die like a man; it is less easy to live like a man," observed Arbusoff, picking up a revolver.

"Your turn comes next; sooner or later they will get you," replied Bobroff; "as for your English friend —" but Arbusoff had fired and taken the wind out of his victim.

We heard the bang of the pistol; but Bobroff still lived. The bullet had turned from him, glancing aside and striking a shelf of books some yards to his right.

"Strip him; he wears a shirt of mail," thundered Arbusoff.

Bobroff was down with four or five men upon his chest.

They tore the clothes from him. He tried to speak, he tried to fend them off with his clenched fists. It was no use.

"It is no shirt of mail, but this," a voice rang out. The man was holding up a miniature set in a heavy silver frame, — the very picture of my Joan which rests upon my writing table next this hand!

Could Bobroff be De Jarnac? But no; I had Arbusoff's word that Jarnac was identical with the Grand Duke Paul Ivanuitch. And if the Grand Duke were not De Jarnac, why had Arbusoff let me fight my duel with him?

CHAPTER LII

I AM at Lympne in Kent, in my own house, hers and mine; for she has come back to me at last, as all these years I have known and believed she must come back to me.

It is September and the year is 1907. For three months, since the day I found her waiting for me at Garioch, I have put this manuscript aside. Now, at her wish, I wind it up with one more chapter.

Last year about this time I had just recovered from the wound that Bobroff dealt me before they finished with him. Instead of a shirt of mail they had found Joan's portrait on his heart — the scoundrel had loved her, as who could help loving her, once the truth and beauty of her face had been revealed.

There had been a moment's lull in the butchery when Joan's portrait had been torn off its slender chain. I would have seized it; but Bobroff, profiting by the opportunity, that instant's flash of freedom, had somehow managed to snatch a pistol from his executioners, and, before Arbusoff could intervene, had pulled the trigger. I think he must have died happy, deeming my wound mortal.

So *he* was De Jarnac! Before I swooned they had broken him with a score of bullets, and it was not Joan's face that my gaze rested on in those hot moments, but Bobroff's, cold and pallid, with wide eyes. He was, in-

deed, the man. It was not only Joan's portrait on his breast that proclaimed him, but that last fierce impulse to slay me before his going was an admission loud enough to quell the wildest doubt. I knelt over his eyes until the light left mine.

What I remember next was the salt of the sea and the motion of a vessel, Arbusoff beside me, and a Baltic fog beyond the porthole. We were bound for London.

I was too weak to think consecutively or to question what had been provided by the magician to whom I already owed so much.

"I have smuggled you out of Russia, and, incidentally, myself; I needed a holiday. I shall hand you over to your friends and then return," he explained.

Our ship, the *Perm*, was a small tramp steamer of some six hundred tons' register, flying the Danish flag and manned by Danish sailors. We took six days to make London, using the Kiel Canal and calling for an hour or two at Copenhagen. The voyage was tonical, the first of peace and quiet I had tasted since leaving England in December last. Arbusoff had managed to get me safely down to Windau, a wretched little port somewhere between Riga and Reval; he had spent money lavishly and here we were.

"But why did you let me fight the Grand Duke Paul Ivanutch," I asked him one day; "why the Grand Duke, when Bobroff was my man?"

He smiled his coolest smile. "The Grand Duke was the worse shot of the two," he answered; "I thought it would be safer."

What could one do but smile back at him?

"And the portrait," I ventured, "that turned your

bullet and that you at first mistook for a coat of mail, what has become of that?"

"I have returned it to the original, to the Countess Bobroff," he answered gravely; "you will remember we made a bargain that no private interest should ever arise or be discussed between us."

"When I am well, I shall go back to Russia," I said later, when a clearer knowledge of events had shaped itself and I was feeling something of a man again.

"You will never go back to Russia," Arbusoff returned. "Even in England you may have to explain your presence among us on that night; though, in my judgment, little will be said about a matter so little creditable to the Autocracy. But Russia," he ended, "you cannot go back to Russia."

"I must; whatever your police demand of me, I must," I answered doggedly.

"All that you seek in Russia will come to you in England if you have patience. I promise it you," he added, giving me his hand.

He would commit himself no deeper, but this assurance came from him with the same weight, the same certainty, that had marked all his previous communications.

"One thing I will tell you before we leave this subject," he had pursued. "The Countess Bobroff has spent the winter at Segewold as the guest of Prince Patiomkin. Bobroff's sister is with her and the two ladies are devoted friends. The Countess has all this while been unaware of your presence in Russia. It was Bobroff's intention to have her with him at Riga, but you, my dear sir, made that project impossible. Had he succeeded in removing you from Riga, the Countess would have come down from

Segewold. It was only your obstinacy that turned Bobroff into a grass-widower; and no wonder, therefore, that he was so anxious to be rid of you!"

"Then the two ladies who were driving in a sleigh at Segewold and whom I passed in the park were the Countess Bobroff and her sister-in-law?"

"Most likely," returned Arbusoff.

Joan herself has confirmed this opinion. She remembers the occasion perfectly, but little did she dream that it was I who drove in the other sleigh surrounded by the five dragoons.

And now let us turn to her story. I have the particulars of it from herself and from De Croisnel, who, now that there is nothing to check his confidences, has at last spoken freely.

What Bobroff told me about the motor breaking down and the purchase of the Château Jarnac near Avignon is substantially true. It was the Grand Duke Paul Ivanutch who made this purchase, and so amused was he with the mad old gentleman of the Château, that he forthwith re-christened Bobroff Count de Jarnac, and, under that style and title, presented him to all his friends. The joke went so far that Bobroff was still known as De Jarnac when a party to which he was attached met the Gariochs in Italy. The Grand Duke travelling incognito was with them and insisted on keeping up the deception. This pleasantry actually went so far that it was under the name De Jarnac that Bobroff came to Garioch, and, being a perfect French scholar, there was little chance of any one discovering his real name and nationality. There was, however, an additional reason why Bobroff retained his pseudonym.

He had heard of me and Joan's prior engagement. With

a subtle cunning he decided promptly that, once she was his, all trace of her might be lost by his reappearance as the Count Bobroff and herself as the Countess. His assumed name, should I show fight, would be the very thing to throw me off the track. How well he succeeded you already know.

He broke the news to her in Paris, and here I come to the one fine quality in this man, the one definite action which is sufficient to prove that, had his way not lain amid the hollow pomps of courts, had he not been the servant and parasite of princes, he might well have been worthy of any woman's love. He faced Joan squarely. "I demand that you break with home and parents," he said to her. "My name is Bobroff, the Count Bobroff; consequently you are the Countess Bobroff. There is no longer a Count de Jarnac; there is no longer a Countess de Jarnac. I demand that you break with home and parents, becoming the Countess Bobroff and passing altogether out of the knowledge of everybody who knew you before this day. I am asking much," he said; "in return I offer you much. Give me your word of honour," he continued, "that you will do nothing to upset this arrangement and I will give you my word of honour that until you come to me of your own free will and tell me that your heart is entirely mine I shall treat you with all the respect that is due to a woman who through no fault of hers has been forced to adopt a course that in no way represents the true state of her feelings. My pride is equal to your own," he ended; "you will be free from my attentions until you come to me with open arms, avowing that you return the affection that I feel for you. I grant you this and I affirm it with my word; in return you will promise me that so far as every-

thing that came before this day is concerned and as long as our marriage lasts Joan Garioch is dead."

She gave her word of honour and went free. Bobroff was loyal. He never reproached her, and all these years he had waited vainly for the woman he loved to melt.

They had travelled much; they had lived on the Count's Russian estates; the day I so nearly ran them to earth in Paris they had actually been settling accounts with Mathilde and the Master. It was De Croisnel in combination with the telegraph wire who had secured my expulsion a few days before.

The death of Bobroff had come to Joan suddenly. The dead man's sister and she had actually become fast friends. It was decided — and his Imperial Majesty himself had taken an interest in the matter — that Joan should spend a year in the convent of St. Catherine. There she had remained for a year and a month, cut off from the world and forgetting as she could the memories that lay between her and our youth. One sign of life she sent into the outside world. It was the portrait that had come to me so mysteriously last New Year's day, with her initial and mine written in tiny characters under the heavy silver frame; the same portrait that Bobroff had worn on the night of his execution. He had had it painted, but she long ago had written "J. S." imperceptibly on the margin as a token and as a pledge. Another recluse who was about to face the world again had written the address, and a friend of this person, Arbusoff by name, had made it his business to see that the picture reached me safely.

And why, you will ask, was the Grand Duke Paul Ivanitch known to the revolutionary council as Jarnac? The answer is simple. Some pseudonym he had to choose, and

this fantastic name occurring to him after half a dozen years, he straightway adopted it, most probably with a laugh at its humorous associations.

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It is evening. I look up and see the marsh spreading before me, to Hastings on my right, to Hythe and farther on my left. Perhaps I have omitted some few things in these last pages, these closing sheets that I have appended to a narrative begun in loneliness and often heavy with my sorrows. But in a happiness such as that which has come to me now, in a serenity that begrudges each moment spent away from her, do these things matter? Love is silent and has no words, nor does it look for them. And so I finish, leaving the unblotted page, letting who will write in my happiness, content to accept, to know, and to enjoy.



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